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Max Weber at Work 1910-1912:
'Primitive' Experiments Beyond the Known Dimensions

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Max Weber at Work 1910-1912:
'Primitive' Experiments Beyond the Known Dimensions

by

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Abstract

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This thesis seeks to build on earlier interpretations of Weber's writings and paintings in the years between 1910 and 1912 by illustrating how the contemporary discourses of primitivism inflected Weber's assimilation of these and other areas of knowledge into his understanding of the intellectual, affective, and sensorial processes involved in the making and viewing of art. Of particular interest here are the intersections that Weber created in his two 1910 essays, "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" and "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists," between certain key primitivist tropes, his interest in "plastic" formal values and aspects of popular science and mathematics, and the wider cultural fascination with the spiritual. This thesis explores this web of associations to reveal that Weber's transformative engagement with primitivism alongside these other key concerns that governed his theorizing on the function and value of works of art. Central to this thesis are Weber's two 1910 texts

along with his paintings of 1910-1912, including his “Crystal Figures,” which stand as Weber’s most substantive theoretical and aesthetic statements at this early moment of his career. These various productions are analyzed simultaneously to illustrate the ways in which Weber’s writings and visual experimenting complement each other and reveal the novel ways in which he integrated diverse areas of knowledge into his arguments for the importance of art in the new world of the twentieth century.

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Introduction

In 1911 the American artist Max Weber published a short poem in the pages of Alfred Stieglitz's little magazine *Camera Work*.[1] Entitled "To Xochipilli, Lord of Flowers," the poem was addressed to a particular Mesoamerican sculpture that Weber had seen at the American Museum of Natural History:

> Thou art a flower, tender of attitude/yet virile of form./Oh, lord of flowers Xochipilli!/Of clay thou art made;/ But thy maker thee embodied/With spirit vibrating and filling./Thou starest with an all seeing,/all penetrating eye./Thou fillest boundless space,/Watcher of endless time,/ Speaker of the universal tongue./ Thou art more living than/Ten thousand others made of flesh./'Tis because of they maker/That thou art thus.[2]

Descriptors such as "tender in attitude" and "virile of form," suggest that the sculpture elicited a powerful response from Weber on both a physical and an emotional level. This language is richly experiential, but also enigmatic. Weber's references to the "all seeing . . . all penetrating eye," "endless time," and the "universal tongue" reveal a mystical bent that is further emphasized by his insinuation that the sculpture represents some sort of transference of spirit between makers and their materials: "Of clay thou art made;/But thy maker thee embodied/With spirit vibrating and filling."

Looking back on "To Xochipilli" in 1958 Weber insisted, "I didn't know any meter or rhyme . . . but I wrote as I felt, and I began writing my poetry at the [American]

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[1] Max Weber, "To Xochipilli, Lord of Flowers," *Camera Work* 33 (January 1911), 34.

[2] Recent work by Anna Greutzner Robins has uncovered a possible visual source for this poem; a Mixtec tripod effigy vase in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (AMHA 30/10736). See Robins, "The Company of Strangers: Max Weber and the first Grafton Group Exhibition," in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London 1905-1915*, ed. Sarah MacDougall (Farham, UK and Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2014), 75.

Museum of Natural History, addressing myself to the dearest friends I had in America."[3] Further on in the interview, Weber again stated, "I just wrote as I felt," and went on to dissect his own language, explaining that his words "still had some aroma of art . . . [in] aesthetic terms, but simple." He recalled his process: sitting before a sculpture and using "verbal expression" to "describe its gesture, its attitudes, the sculpturesque qualities, and sometimes I would creep so deep into one of those that I think I met the carver or creator of [the sculpture]."[4] For Weber, these experiences were intense and intimate moments of study and discovery across time and space, experiences that could reveal universal truths. He characterized "To Xochipilli" as an "adoration" of the sculpture, and looking back to the poem's richly experiential language and references to a mystical union of spirit and material, one tends to agree with the artist's assessment of his poem.[5]

"To Xochipilli" was Weber's third published writing in *Camera Work*, following two short essays published in 1910: "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" and "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists." It was also the beginning of an interest in poetry that would eventually lead to the publication of his *Cubist Poems* in 1914.[6] The three earlier texts represent Weber's first public statements about art following his early 1909 return to New York from Europe, where he had spent the previous five years absorbing the new theories and visual possibilities presented by

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[3] "The Reminiscences of Max Weber," interview by Carol S. Gruber (New York: Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1958), 510.
[4] "The Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 510-511.
[5] "The Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 509.
[6] For the two earlier essays, see Weber, "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View," *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910), 25; and Weber "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists," *Camera Work* 31 (July 1910), 51. Both essays are reproduced here in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

vanguard artists such as Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Georges Braque.[7] Weber's texts of 1910 and 1911 have been studied as "aesthetic time capsules" by numerous scholars interested in illuminating Weber's engagement with avant-garde discourses on aesthetics, popular science, mathematics and mysticism, and understanding his role as a conduit of information between Paris and New York.[8] Weber's fascination with form in "To Xochipilli," along with his allusions to the transference of spirit between maker and material, can be contextualized within the parameters of these studies.

However, one significant aspect of Weber's poem that has been passed over in these analyses is its subject matter. He quite literally addressed the poem to a sculpture, a sculpture that would have been considered "primitive" during this period because of its geographical and cultural origins. Weber's recollections of his visits to the American Museum of Natural History and his process of writing "just as [he] felt," noted above, reveal that he was greatly affected by this sculpture. The artist himself explained how the "sculpturesque" values of the object, its innate physical qualities of form, contributed to his fascination with the piece. Weber's paintings of 1910-1912, especially his many compositions featuring the nude female figure, such as *Two Figures* of 1910 and *Three Witches* of 1911, display a similar fascination with materiality, as evidenced by their

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[7] Percy North provided an excellent overview of Weber's early life and career in "Max Weber: The Cubist Decade," in *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade* (Atlanta, G.A.: High Museum of Art, 1991), 21-48.

[8] Both Linda Dalrymple Henderson and Willard Bohn have applied this term directly to "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View." See Bohn, *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 22-23; and Henderson, in *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometries in Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 323.

defined contours and the bulky appearances of the figures (figs. 25, 35). Previous scholars have already drawn connections between these works by Weber and the paintings of Picasso and Braque's African period, as well as to tribal sculpture and masks from Africa and Oceania. And to be sure, the two paintings by Weber reveal an interest in the tactile qualities of form that can also be located in works by Picasso such as *Three Women* of 1908 and Braque's *La Femme* of 1907, the type of works that were crucial stimuli for the artist. However, as we shall see, in Weber's works there is a stubborn insistence on the integrity of the figure that is grounded in his theories. Going beyond previous scholarship, this thesis explores the way in which Weber's theorizing about aspects of the "primitive" assured that his formal innovations, rooted both in "primitive" art and the primitivizing styles of Picasso and Braque, carried unique implications in terms of generating meaning and affective responses.

This thesis takes the position that the key to understanding Weber's unique approach to the visual possibilities for form and composition that he observed in Parisian avant-garde painting and various types of world art lies in his theories, which stand in their own right as unique blends of ideas. In choosing to analyze Weber's visual and textual productions separately within various contexts such as his interest in popular science or current aesthetic debates, scholars have neglected a full consideration of the issues of primitivism in relations to these contexts.[9] In his two 1910 essays, Weber

[9] Gail Levin briefly discussed Weber's interests in primitivism in a longer essay on primitivism in American art that was published in the catalogue for William Rubin's exhibition 'Primitivism' and Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" at The Museum of Modern Art. See Levin, "American Art," in Rubin, ed. *'Primitivism' and Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the*

referenced key primitivist tropes—the "noble savage," the "wild man," fetishism and idol worship, and the "primitive" as essentially childlike—in the course of making significant arguments about plastic formal values and the reception of works of art. Weber's invocation of primitivism in this context suggests that for him, contemplation and study of the "primitive" and "primitive" art could have critical implications on the level of aesthetics, in terms of "plastic" formal values and composition, and on the level of creating and conveying meaning through reception of art. Analysis will focus on Weber's two texts, "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" and "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists," along with his paintings of 1910-1912. including his "Crystal Figures," since these productions represent his most public and substantive statements on the value and function of works of art in his early career.

To define "primitive" in this thesis I will rely on the definition laid out by the art historian Frances Connelly in her book *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in European Art and Aesthetics: 1725-1907*. Connelly defines the "primitive" as "a collection of visual attributes that Europeans construed to be universally characteristic of early, or primal artistic expression."[10] European interest in "primitive" art tended to be ahistorical and ethnocentric; that is the Europeans concentrated on attributes of non-Western objects that they identified as "*Unformen,* primordial forms of expression, among them the hieroglyph, the grotesque, and the ornamental."[11] Indeed, Connelly's study demonstrated

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Modern, (New York; The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 453-473. See also 20, n. 19 for critical commentary on Rubin's exhibition and catalogue.

[10] Frances Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in European Art and Aesthetics: 1725-1907* (University Park, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 5.

[11] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 5.

that these attributes actually served as a sort of "conduit" that furnished "the link between European ideas *about* "primitive" art and the actual *emergence* of primitivizing styles in modern art" (my italics).[12]

Connelly's definition is discursive; she identified the primary terms and concepts that directed European reception of "primitive" art to show how these key concepts—the grotesque, ornament, hieroglyph and even idol and fetish—also directed the ways in which modern artists could appropriate the formal elements of the objects and the resulting affective response.[13] What made this entire process possible was the literal stripping of original context away from "primitive" objects be they Egyptian, Oceanic, African, or Chinese, through the way that they were discussed in both popular and intellectual circles. Gill Perry invoked Michel Foucault's writings on discursive power relationships to explain that the colonial power dynamics in place at the time were what made this wholesale de-contextualization possible.[14] Many non-European people, and especially those in Africa and Oceania, were subject to brutal imperialist violence and excess that was, in the first decade of the twentieth century, only just beginning to be revealed to the European public.[15]

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[12] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 6.
[13] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 6.
[14] Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" in *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.
[15] Patricia Leighten has argued that social and political crises caused by the revelations of the violence and abuse suffered by indigenous peoples in the French and Belgian colonies in equatorial Africa may have been what sparked the Parisian avant-garde's sudden and intense interest in African sculpture around 1906-1907. See Leighten, " The White Peril and *L'Art Nègre:* Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," *The Art Bulletin* 72.4 (Dec. 1990), 609-630.

Perry credits the growth of ethnographic museums with assisting in this process of de-contextualization. Artists often had themselves little ethnographic knowledge or interest, and in many cases their contact with "primitive" objects was heavily mediated by the colonialist agendas of the various governments that authorized and funded the creation of the museums and colonial expositions where the artists encountered such objects.[16] The establishment of ethnographic museums and the institutionalization of anthropological study thus reinforced the pejorative value of the "primitive;" because this lack of context provided in the display and discussion of these objects encouraged a strain of essentialism that equated non-Western peoples with their material production.[17] This practice easily exploited by artists, whom Perry explains, "capitalized on the lack of an accessible iconography or history to define these works according to the western avant-garde code."[18] Within this code attributes such as bodily "deformity," dense surface patterning, and any sort of roughness in texture—perceived as lack of finish—were ascribed to the "primitive" and appropriated by modern artists.

Thus we come to a working understanding of primitivism as the discursive formations surrounding the popular idea of the "primitive."[19] The terms of these

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[16] Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" 5.

[17] Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Primitive," in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds. *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 181.

[18] Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" 58.

[19] Both Connelly and Perry were writing in response to scholarship by William Rubin, whose controversial exhibition "'Primitivism' and Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" and accompanying catalogue essay have been generally agreed upon to have isolated primitivism in the visual arts as an idiosyncratic, deeply personalized tendency among modern artists. These critics argue that Rubin's writing did not adequately acknowledge the complex social, political, and intellectual frameworks that shaped artists' engagement with "primitive art;" notably circumscribing the ethnocentrism of European attitudes toward this art and the dynamics of colonialism and imperialism encoded in its display in the early

formations and the flow of ideas are entirely based on a western-centered view of culture which, through a process of "othering," obscured the violence of European imperialism with justifications of that violence on the grounds of the "barbarity and backwardness" of various non-European societies.[20] In this mindset, it became Europe's job the "civilize" these groups, and that process was carried out through conquest and forced assimilation to European ideas. However, this discussion only gets at one side of the dual connotations of "primitive" in early twentieth century discourses. That is, for many European artists and philosophers the "primitive" also carried positive associations: "primitive" peoples and the things they made were considered to embody the "essential purity and goodness" of the human race, in the face of the "decadence of the over-civilized West."[21]

In part it was this so-called positive connotation that drew the Parisian avant-garde, as well as Weber and several of his American compatriots, to explore the possibilities for new approaches to form in the visual arts through observation and appreciation of the "primitive." For young modernists the "primitive" or *naïf* mind brought with it heightened experience of reality through a greater reliance on the physical senses in perception. This sensorial acuity was suited particularly well to the making of things, which could be imbued with more visual and emotional impact through expression unhindered by any faith to the academic conventions of Western art. The "primitive" maker still responded to nature, but it was a nature filtered through his own

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twentieth century. See Rubin, ed. *'Primitivism' and Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern,* 2 vols. (New York; The Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

[20] Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" 5.

[21] Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" 5. For an in-depth discussion of both the positive and pejorative associations of the "primitive" see Jack Flam and Miriam Duetch, "Introduction," in *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: A Documentary History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-27.

distinct sensorial experience of the world. Western eyes located a sense of this unhindered expression in what they perceived to be the rough-hewn qualities of the carving of African or Mesoamerican statuary, the bright colors of Hopi Kachinas, the powerful and exacting lines of Japanese prints, and the lack of hierarchical Renaissance perspective in Chinese watercolors.

Weber, like other young European and American modernists, held a privileged position within the power dynamics of the imperialist system that made possible this celebration of the "primitive" alongside the wholesale appropriation of these forms of world art into Western avant-garde painting. This rather lengthy preamble on primitivism and the "primitive" is included here to outline the cultural attitudes that conditioned Weber's experience and appropriation of non-Western art and to begin to contextualize his use of the term "primitive" and his use of "primitive" imagery in both his writings and visual representations. However, Weber's engagement with "primitive" art and primitivism was also conditioned by a number of other coexistent forces in contemporary culture. Some of these forces include: current aesthetic debates among artists, popular interest in the spiritual, discussions of advancements in science and mathematics, such as, higher dimensional geometries, and as this thesis will put forward, the advent of X-ray crystallography. This thesis intends to explore the new and novel ways that Weber assimilated these various strains of thought into his theorizing on the value and function of works of art. Once again, this thesis will situate Weber's fascination with the "primitive" amongst his other varied interests to underscore how he used it as crucial scaffolding for visual experimentation in his painting.

Chapter 1: *Weber, Matisse, and the New York Critical Context*

In 1905 Max Weber traversed the Atlantic, embarking on a journey that would take him to Italy, Spain, the Low Countries, and ultimately France where he would settle in Paris until early 1909. While in Paris, Weber befriended Pablo Picasso, Henri Rousseau, Leo Stein, Gertrude Stein, Michael and Sarah Stein, Patrick Henry Bruce, and a number of other young Americans. He remembered spending Saturday evenings at Leo and Gertrude's famous soirees; in looking back on these evenings he quipped these gatherings were akin to "a sort of international clearing house of ideas and matters of art, for the young and aspiring artist [sic] from all over the world."[22] Weber studied under Jean Paul Laurens at the Academie Julian where he became an accomplished draughtsman. Weber was soon fed up with Laurens' doctrinaire approach and in 1908 became one of the key instigators of the famous "Matisse Class" in 1908, where he studied alongside Sarah Stein and other young artists under the direct tutelage of Matisse. Weber learned a number of important lessons from Matisse, many of which will be discussed in later chapters. So too, the young American exhibited alongside the leaders of the Parisian avant-garde at the Salon des Artistes Indépendents and the Salon d'Automne.

Weber famously dubbed Paris "the stock exchange in art;" describing the atmosphere he encountered there as one of "turmoil" that was dominated the race for new

[22] Weber quote reproduced in Percy North, "Max Weber: Bringing Paris to New York," in *Max Weber: Bringing Paris to New York* (Baltimore Museum of Art, 2013), 13.

"theories; each one crying he found something!"[23] Upon returning to New York in early 1909 Weber found quite the opposite feeling. For Weber New York at this moment was "the north pole of modern art," due in part to the Academic stranglehold on the arts that had reduced painting, in Weber's opinion, to "photography by hand."[24] Yet, even in this rather bleak landscape Weber found sustenance. Fellow artists Robert Henri and Arthur B. Davies became early supporters of Weber's work, and soon after returning to New York Weber began his fraught relationship with Alfred Stieglitz, who began showing his work in 1910. Stieglitz also published several of Weber's writings in his little magazine *Camera Work* from 1910 until the two parted ways in 1912 just prior to the Armory Show. Through his associations with Stieglitz Weber exhibited alongside Alfred Maurer and Patrick Henry Bruce, whom he had met in Paris, and he developed friendships with Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove.

Though Weber found safe harbor in Stieglitz's circle at '291,' the public that he encountered in New York was less than hospitable to modern art and the theories that lay beneath it. Nowhere is this hostility better exemplified than in art critic Arthur Hoeber's review of the 1910 Matisse exhibition at Stieglitz's gallery:

> We are informed by Mr. Stieglitz, however, and his enthusiastic band that there is a mysterious something Matisse was after which is not immediately apparent . . . but at the present moment of writing these photographs of paintings seem as insolent as they are foolish, as graceless as they are unbeautiful, with which we leave them as worth little of our serious consideration.[25]

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[23] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 251-2.
[24] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 77, 79-80.
[25] Arthur Hoeber, untitled review from the *New York Globe,* reprinted in *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910), 52.

Thus Hoeber concluded his review, and he was far from alone in his displeasure; the drawings and photographs of paintings shown in the exhibition confounded even critics sympathetic to modern art. James Huneker wrote for the *New York Sun*: "At his worst, [Matisse] shocks; at his best his art is as attractive as an art can be that reveals while it dazzles, makes captive when it consoles."[26] New York's relationship with modern art was fraught, if not sometimes downright hostile, throughout the early twentieth century. That was especially true in the years between 1908, when Alfred Stieglitz started showing avant-garde European art, and the Armory Show of 1913.

In July of 1910, following his debut at '291' alongside Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, and John Marin, Weber published two important texts in Stieglitz's little magazine, *Camera Work:* "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" and "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists."[27] Weber seems to walk a fine line in these texts, negotiating between American hostility to European modernism and his own fascination with the art and theories that he encountered in Paris. This chapter will begin with brief discussions of each text, analyzing Weber's principal arguments and highlighting subsequent scholarly readings that have helped recover the cultural and intellectual context of these two texts. The final section of this chapter will take a slightly wider focus to discuss the evolving discourses on form and expression in art, which will provide crucial groundwork for later chapters.

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[26] James Huneker, untitled review from the *New York Sun,* reprinted in *Camera Work* 30 (April 1910), 48.
[27] See 16, n.6 for full citations of both of Weber's essays.

WEBER'S "THE FOURTH DIMENSION FROM A PLASTIC POINT OF VIEW"

In "The Fourth Dimension From a Plastic Point of View" Weber considers the possible ramifications that the existence of higher dimensions could have on the visual arts. He begins his text,

> In plastic art, I believe, there is a fourth dimension which may be described as the consciousness of a great and overwhelming sense of space-magnitude in all directions at one time, and is brought into existence through the three known measurements. It is not a physical entity or a mathematical hypothesis, nor an optical illusion. It is real, and can be perceived and felt.[28]

A prominent assertion that appears again and again in this essay is that the fourth dimension is "real," and that it can be accessed through the "three known measurements" that define three dimensional objects: width, height and depth. Weber's fourth dimension "[e]xists outside and in the presence of objects, and is the space that envelops a tree, a tower, a mountain, or any solid; or the intervals between objects of volumes of matter if receptively beheld." The operative phrase here is "receptively beheld:" Weber's focus is on the reception of objects, and the role that objects play in raising consciousness. For Weber the fourth dimension "arouses the imagination and stirs emotion," a "dimension of infinity" that exists in nature and can be "perceived and felt" through observation and contact with the physical world.

The discovery of X-rays, radioactivity, the many other scientific advances that took place in the 1890's and early years of the twentieth century had a profound effect on artists, critics, and art theorists.[29] These new findings challenged long-held views of the

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[28] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

[29] For a more detailed discussion of this scientific context, see Henderson, "Reintroduction," in *Fourth Dimension,* 15-27.

world and man's place within it, not in the least because these discoveries proved the old dictum that there was much more to life than "what meets the eye" in the visible world. In her numerous writings on Weber and "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" Linda Henderson has situated Weber's interest in the fourth dimension within this wider atmosphere of questioning of nineteenth-century positivist philosophy, which manifested itself in the arts through the rejection of naturalism and academism by vanguard artists on both sides of the Atlantic.[30] Willard Bohn observed in his assessment of this idea's reach in the early twentieth century that the fourth dimension had become somewhat of a cliché in the period, an oft used metaphor for aesthetic exploration and "discovery of new possibilities."[31]

Both Henderson and Bohn credit the malleability of the concept of the fourth dimension as part of its expansive influence in avant-garde circles at the time. Henderson described its "double-sided appeal" as both scientific and geometric theory on one hand and a mystical philosophy on the other.[32] Due in part to this duality, and the mounting scientific evidence that reality was more complex than could be observed with the naked eye, the fourth dimension also received widespread attention in popular literature— and more so in the United States than in any other country.[33] Periodicals such as *Harper's Monthly Magazine, Harper's Weekly, McClure's* and *The Forum* all carried articles

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[30] Henderson devotes an entire chapter to discussions of Weber and the context for the fourth dimension in the United States. See Chapter 4 "The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in America," in *Fourth Dimension,* 289-368.

[31] Bohn analyzes Weber's Fourth Dimension text in relation to Apollinaire's slightly later writings on the subject in the second chapter of his book "Probing the Fourth Dimension: Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Weber," in *The Rise of Surrealism,* 7-26.

[32] Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, 289.

[33] Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, 289.

concerned with the fourth dimension, as did science oriented periodicals such as *The Popular Science Monthly, Science,* and *The New Science Review*.[34] *Scientific American* had in fact held an essay contest in 1909 that featured a wide range of submissions exploring both the mystical and scientific possibilities presented by the possibility of a fourth dimension.[35]

Weber's article in *Camera Work* was the first anywhere to deal specifically with the ramifications of the interest in higher dimensions in the visual arts, and his text reveals an awareness of the new mathematical theories, such as his description of the fourth dimension as the "overwhelming sense of space-magnitude in all directions at one time, [which] is brought into existence through the three known measurements."[36] His reference to the "overwhelming sense of space-magnitude" that can be felt "in all directions at once," calls to mind the contemporary interest in new geometries. This interest had stemmed from the development of n-dimensional geometry in the nineteenth century that challenged the limitations of Euclid's geometry to the three primary dimensions of width, depth, and height.[37] Weber's reference to the "known measurements" likely alludes to Euclid's three dimensions. However, given his explicit statement that the fourth dimension is not a "mathematical hypothesis," these signals

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[34] For citations of articles related to these new geometries see Henderson, "Appendix B: American Articles Popularizing the New Geometries, 1877-1920," in *Fourth Dimension*, 523-527.
[35] Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, 317.
[36] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[37] Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, 306.

toward geometry are probably meant in a metaphorical sense, as Bohn and Henderson have argued, and would have helped justify his argument.[38]

In this period, the fourth dimension was believed to be a physical characteristic of space, which could be potentially accessed through art. Weber's "plastic point of view" indicates this, and his primary examples of the fourth dimension in art are built around formal values and construction:

> The ideal dimension is dependent for its existence upon the three material dimensions, and is created entirely through plastic means, colored and constructed matter in space and light. Life and its visions can only be realized and made possible through matter.[39]

Here Weber likely drew on his memories Leo Stein's discussions of form, but also via Stein's influence Bernard Berenson's emphasis on the "tactile values" of Florentine painting.[40] Matisse's teachings also could have been a touchstone here, as Weber's memories of the Matisse Class and Sarah Stein's notes both reveal that the Fauve painter had encouraged his students to appreciate the formal values of Cézanne alongside African, Archaic Greek, and Egyptian sculpture, types of sculpture that Weber claims possess the "rare quality" of the fourth dimension.[41]

Harvard psychologist William James, whose empiricist theories had captured the attention of both Stein and Berenson, published an article that hinted at the existence of a fourth dimension in 1910. James's article posited that there could exist a "transmundane

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[38] See 4, ns. 5 and 6.

[39] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

[40] Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, 306.

[41] Alfred Barr was the first to publish Sarah Stein's notes and all quotations from the notes included here will be drawn from his reproduction of them. See Barr, *Matisse,* 550-552 for the full text, in particular sections on "Study of a Model" and "Sculpture" for references to African art. See also "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 70-75.

experience, something in being correspond-ing to a 'fourth dimension'" in which abstract concepts and concrete experiences would combine into one inextricable perceptual mass.[42] Jill Anderson Kyle has suggested that this theory may have served as the implicit premise on which Weber based his fourth dimension essay.[43] Weber's fourth dimension can be "perceived and felt" and comments like this suggest that Weber was drawing on James's theories of perception, which the artist applied to the concrete experience of art, and combining those with the psychologist's speculations on higher dimensions.[44]

Looking beyond formal values and their links to perceptual psychology, in his fourth dimension essay Weber also drew significantly on the monist philosophy of Edward Carpenter.[45] Weber was likely exposed to Carpenter's 1906 treatise on monism, *The Art Creation: Seven Essays on the Self and its Power,* by his friend Alvin Langdon Coburn while he was visiting London in 1908.[46] Echoes of Carpenter's insistence on the inseparable union of spirit and matter can be heard throughout Weber's text, but the strongest comes in the article's final paragraph, where Weber declares that "even thought is matter. It is all the matter of things, real things or earth or matter." Statements like this add an air of mysticism to the text that bring it into concert with Weber's interests in

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[42] William James, "On a Very Prevalent Abuse of Abstraction," *The Popular Science Monthly* 74.5 (May 1909), 488.
[43] Jill Anderson Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting: 1900-1920," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1995) 273.
[44] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 273.
[45] Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "Mysticism as the 'Tie That Binds': The Case of Edward Carpenter and Modernism," (*Arts Magazine* 46.1, Spring 1987), 29-37.
[46] Edward Carpenter, *The Art of Creation: Essays on the Self and Its Powers* (London: G. Allen, 1907). Henderson outlines the Coburn connection in "Mysticism as the 'Tie That Binds."

Emersonian transcendentalism and the Symbolist predilections of other members of the Stieglitz circle, which called for a spiritual renewal in the arts alongside a formal one.[47]

"Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists" and the Notorious Matisse

The second essay of Weber's in the June 1910 issue of *Camera Work* was "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists." Weber began with a pejorative comparison between paintings by "modern painter colorists" and so-called "primitive" works of art—"Chinese dolls, Hopi Katcina images, and also Indian quilts and baskets—elevating the "primitive" above the former due to a perceived lack of sincerity of expression.[48] Weber's opening salvo is aimed directly at the latest developments in Paris:

> But at the Salon d'Automne and the Salon des Artistes Indépendents , the canvases of some of the color masters seem to shriek out, 'Why the whole world depends on me! Don't you know that?" And pretty soon a mob gathers out front, and on all sides of these masterly colored pieces, and all join the chorus in unison.[49]

Here Weber seems intent on laying bare strains of narcissism and self-absorption that he perceived in contemporary avant-garde painting. He goes on to chastise this group of "modern painter colorists" for relying too much on "the laws of modern chromatics" at the expense of formal values and compositional structure, leaving each canvas as a "*tache*

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[47] Henderson, "Mysticism as 'The Tie that Binds,'" 32-33. For further explication of Weber's interests in mysticism and Carpenter, see Henderson's essay "Mysticism, Romanticism, and the Fourth Dimension," in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986), 219-237.

[48] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.

[49] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.

of formless color."[50] These modern works pale in comparison to the sincerity and authenticity that Weber saw in "primitive" art.

"Chinese Dolls" is usually read as the artist's definitive disavowal of Matisse's Fauvism—in particular, the use of unmixed color and exceedingly loose brushwork.[51] Although Weber never invokes the name of Matisse or *Les Fauves*, his language strongly suggests that Fauvism is on his mind:

> No smear of Veronese green, juxtaposed with one of vermilion, or other formless complementary daubs or splashes, however brilliant in color, can ever take the place of even the dullest toned or moderately colored painting that has form. There can be no color without there being a form, in space and in light, with substance and weight, to hold the color.[52]

Phrases such as "smear of Veronese green" and "formless complementary daubs and splashes [of color]," are actually very much in keeping with the broader response to Matisse's work in the New York press, giving further credence to the scholarly reading of this text as Weber's break with Fauvism and Matisse.[53] For instance, James Huneker wrote in his review of the exhibition of Matisse drawings and watercolors at '291' in 1908 that the painter's style represented "impressionism run to blotches, mere patches of

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[50] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.

[51] Percy North was the first to approach Weber's two 1910 essays in *Camera Work*, and her reading of "Chinese Dolls" as "open attack on the use of brilliant colors for decorative effect," and a "scathing diatribe against the brilliant fauve style" has become widely accepted. See North, "The Cubist Decade," 23; and for her original treatment,see Phyllis [Percy] North, "Max Weber: The Early Paintings (1905-1920)" (Ph,D. Diss., University of Delaware, 1975), 74.

[52] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.

[53] John Cauman wrote reconstructing the history of critical reactions to Matisse's exhibitions at '291' in 1908, 1910, and 1912. See Cauman, "Henri Matisse, 1908, 1910, and 1912: New Evidence of Life," in Sarah Greenough, ed. *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and his New York Galleries* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 83-115.

crude hectic tintings [sic.]."[54] Reviewing the second exhibition of Matisse at '291' in 1910, Huneker referred to Matisse's color as "bewilderingly opulent."[55]

Just two months before Weber's essays appeared in the pages of *Camera Work*, New York witnessed the publication of Gelett Burgess's now famous article "The Wild Men of Paris" in the pages of the *Architectural Record*.[56] Despite its overtly humorous and mocking tone, "The Wild Men" served as a crucial record of the aesthetic theorizing happening in Paris around 1908-09, since Burgess had visited artists' studios and conducted interviews with them. Alongside interviews with Picasso, André Derain, Georges Braque, and others, Burgess commissioned photographs of their works, which gave many American artists a window into the most advanced work being done in Paris. Though by the time of the article's publication in 1910 these works, such as Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon,* were no longer so current. As the article's title implies, Burgess relies heavily on primitivist tropes to interpret the work of these artists. These tropes will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters, for now Burgess' writing will be analyzed for his critiques of avant-garde style and technique, which are similar to Weber's. This was probably not a coincidence, given Weber's desire to distance himself from the notorious reputation of Matisse in New York at this time.

Burgess's "Wild Men," much like Weber's "Chinese Dolls," begins by describing a visit to the Salon des Indépendents . Burgess reported that he had "scarcely entered . . .

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[54] Huneker, untitled review, reprinted in *Camera Work* 23 (1908), 12.
[55] Huneker, untitled review, reprinted in *Camera Work* 30 (1910), 48.
[56] Gelett Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," *Architectural Record* (May, 1910), 400-14. Reproduced in Antliff and Leighten, *Cubism: A Reader: Documents and Criticism 1906-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 26-40. For the sake of clarity, future citations will use the page numbers associated with the Antliff and Leighten reprint of Burgess's text.

when [he] heard shrieks of laughter" echoing through the galleries, crowds had gathered to gawk at paintings that represented a new "universe of ugliness."[57] Fauve color quickly becomes the target of Burgess's criticism. Thus, he writes "If you can imagine what a particularly sanguinary little girl of eight, half-crazed with gin, would do to a whitewashed wall, if left alone with a box of crayons, then you will come near to fancying what most of the work was like."[58] He went on to decry what he saw as "blobs of virgin color gone wrong, fierce greens and coruscating yellows, violent purples, sickening reds and shuddering blues."[59] Elsewhere Burgess takes aim at formal distortion, among other aspects of the new art, describing the nudes he saw as "flayed Martians" that "defied anatomy, physiology, almost geometry itself!"[60] His wry observations on the new use of color are very much in keeping with the wider American objections to advanced European art, one of the principal flashpoints of this rejection being the non-descriptive use of color.

Some American critics tried to find ways around Matisse's bewildering use of color. J.E. Chamberlain, for instance, found praise for Matisse's skills as a draughtsman, writing of the work shown in 1910, "These Matisse drawings are in any case amazing instances of rapid, clear-seeing, revealing draughtsmanship [sic], and are richly worth seeing."[61] Chamberlain makes no reference to Matisse's color, in keeping with other

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[57] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 26.
[58] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 27.
[59] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 27.
[60] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 27.
[61] J.E. Chamberlain, untitled review of 1910 Matisse Exhibition at '291', reprinted in *Camera Work* 30 (1910), 51.

sympathetic critics who chose to more or less ignore it. Bernard Berenson, himself not an ardent supporter of modernism, nevertheless wrote an eloquent defense of Matisse in *The Nation* where he praised the painter's drawing prowess, but confessed, "Of his color, I do not venture to speak . . . I can understand its failing to charm at first, for color is something we Europeans are still singularly uncertain of—we are easily frightened by the slightest divergence from the habitual.[62] It is worth noting that unlike Berenson and some other critics, Weber makes no mention of drawing in "Chinese Dolls." Instead he follows in the footsteps of critics opposed to modern painting, who dismissed Fauve work on the basis of what they considered to be its abuse of color, and as the above passage by Berenson makes clear, even sympathetic critics remained disconcerted by this new use of color.

Given this critical context, it seems quite safe to assume that Weber did intend this short text as a statement against Fauvism, which was almost universally reviled in the United States. However, it is important to say more about Weber's association with Matisse to better understand why such a public break may have been necessary. Weber had been a student of Matisse during the Fauve master's inaugural class at the Couvent des Oiseaux in 1908. Even before that Weber would have been well acquainted with Matisse's work through his connections to the Stein family. Beyond these close personal associations, Weber had a notable public association to Matisse that was thrust on him by

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[62] Berenson wrote this letter as a "vehement counterattack" to comments on Matisse's work in the Salon d'Automne that were made by *The Nation*'s Parisian correspondent in October of 1908. The unnamed journalist suggested that Matisse's works were intended as "insults to the eye." The entire text of Berenson's letter was published in *The Nation* in November of 1908 and was reprinted in Alfred H. Barr, *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951), 114.

the New York press. Weber and his compatriots had been "lumped together, and for the most part damned" as "followers of Matisse" following the "Younger American Painters" exhibition at Stieglitz's '291' gallery in 1910.[63] It is well known that Weber was strong-willed, independent, and that he did not shy away from comparing himself to "constant sufferer[s]" such as Cézanne, who faced critical disparagement and economic hardship in his lifetime.[64] Given this information, and the fact that Weber was already being forced into the position of a follower of Matisse by the press, it is not surprising that he would take to the pages of *Camera Work* to write a rather stinging criticism of modern color painting. As scholars have noted, Weber would have been very eager to create a place for himself as an independent artist among the New York avant-garde.[65]

Alfred Barr made an observation of Matisse's reputation in New York prior to the Armory show that is relevant here, explaining that the Fauve ringleader's work was known more through "traveler's tales" and the work of his "American Disciples" than

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[63] This quotation is drawn from Alfred Barr's account of Matisse's considerable notoriety in the New York press around 1910. In the October issue of *Camera* Work, a text presumably written by the magazine's editorial staff also referred to the group of "Younger American Painters" as "supposed disciples of Matisse." See Barr, *Matisse,* 115-116.

[64] Gail Stavitsky, "Cézanne and American Modernism," in *Cézanne and American Modernism*, (Montclair Art Museum and The Baltimore Museum of Art, 2010), 22.

[65] Nancy Ireson and Anna G. Robins have been the most recent commentators on this essay, their analyses falling in line with the general perception of "Chinese Dolls" as an effort on Weber's part to establish himself as in independent artist. In "Max Weber and the 'Lessons' of Rousseau and Matisse," Ireson cited this text as a manifestation of Weber's continuing effort to process Parisian ideas and to chart his own artistic direction after his return to New York (55). Robins characterized the text in "The Company of Strangers" as Weber's necessary renunciation of his earlier experiments with color in favor of going "back to basics"(74). Both of these essays can be found in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London 1905-1915*. See 15, n. 2.

experience of his paintings.[66] As far as original works were concerned, the shows mounted by Stieglitz and Edward Steichen at '291' featured watercolors and drawings by Matisse (and sculpture in 1912), but paintings were represented *in absentia* through printed reproductions, such as lithographs and photographs. Even when a few original paintings were shown, prior to the Armory Show in 1913, there was a relatively small circle of artists, critics, and collectors who were seeing these works. Thus the press had a strong hand in shaping the reception of Matisse in New York, and Weber seems to have been sensitive to their responses to his former teacher's works. Again, nowhere in "Chinese Dolls" does Weber mention Matisse or the Fauves, but in choosing to critique paintings at the salons where they exhibited—the Salon d'Automne and the Salon des Artistes Indépendents —suggests he intended to call to readers' minds to consider current French art.

This reexamination of Weber's perceived public break with Matisse in "Chinese Dolls" is intended to complicate Weber's relationship to the elder artist's work, and perhaps more importantly, to the reputation of Matisse at this crucial early moment in his career. His first major showing at Stieglitz's gallery had earned him the title of "disciple" of Matisse, and there were critics lamenting the rise of Matisse's influence with American artists. Guy Pène du Bois lamented, on one hand, that Matisse had unrightfully eclipsed Cézanne as the guiding light of modern art, and, on the other, that American talent had been "literally swamped by the overpowering suggestion in the big letters of

[66] Barr suggests, based on the furor Matisse's paintings created in the press after they were shown in the Armory Show, that had they been shown in New York in 1908 the critical reaction probably would have been "much more violent." Barr, *Matisse,* 116.

the name of Matisse."[67] Another critic, in the pages of *American Art News*, protested the "so-called art" of Matisse and accused him of having "seduced" American artists and writers.[68] As has been argued here, Weber capitalized on this notoriety to set himself above *au caurant* French painting, but kept his criticisms of Fauvism general, restricting them to technique and color, the qualities of Fauve painting most widely criticized in America.

WEBER'S ESSAYS, THE EVOLVING DISCOURSE ON FORM IN ART, AND HIS SOURCES

Form plays in a key role in each of Weber's texts: in "Chinese Dolls" it embodies sincerity and spontaneity of expression, while in "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" it bridges the gap between the real world and a higher consciousness (the fourth dimension). In each argument, Weber engages the evolving avant-garde discourse on form in art, to which he would have been exposed to during his time in Paris. Yet, as the above discussion indicates, Weber's source material extends well beyond what he knew from Paris. Drawing further on the scholarship of Kyle and Henderson, who have contributed greatly to recovering the transatlantic discussions on form in art, this section will further situate Weber's two texts in this exchange, specifically focusing on his interests in plasticity, tactility, and the concept of plastic expression.

In his fourth dimension text, Weber drew a direct line to Cézanne, setting the French painter up alongside a diverse group of "primitive" makers as examples of the

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[67] Guy Pène du Bois, untitled review reprinted in *Camera Work* 31 (1910), 46-47. Barr reproduced several quotations from du Bois' review, including the one included here. For his commentary on du Bois criticism see Barr, *Matisse*, 116.

[68] Townsend, untitled review reprinted in *Camera Work* 30 (1910), 52.

ideal artist — each a mediator who observes nature and filters out the ephemeral to revive the essential qualities of the subject. This description of the artist as mediator and synthesizer was very much in the air by the time Weber was in Paris in 1908. It had been carried into the twentieth century from its roots in the writings of Charles Baudelaire, by the criticism of French Symbolists Maurice Denis and Emile Bernard, both of whom were writing about Cézanne in the years Weber was in Paris.[69] Of course, Weber need not have looked any further than Matisse for exposure to this ideal vision of the artist. For Matisse, a painting was essentially a "condensation of sensations:" he believed that the artist could capitalize simultaneously on an objective generating force (the observation of nature) and the subjective force of emotion to make a unique and sincere representation of experience.[70]

In "Notes of a Painter," Matisse had explained the importance of this act of translating experience of nature: "In any event I think that one can judge the vitality and power of an artist who, after having received impressions directly from the spectacle of nature, is able to organize his sensations . . . and to develop those sensations . . . ."[71] Thus, the sincerity of the artist in his making is of paramount importance to determining the value of the work. This principle underlies the value judgments upon which Weber's arguments hinge in both "Chinese Dolls" and the Fourth Dimension essay. Cézanne and

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[69] Richard Shiff provides and excellent summary of Denis and Bernard's critical engagement with Cézanne in these years, see 125-140 in Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism: A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
[70] The oft-cited phrase "condensation of sensations" originates from Matisse, see "Notes of a Painter," in Jack Flam, ed. *Matisse on Art* (New York: Phaidon, 1973), 36. See also 55-58 in Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, for an in-depth discussion of Matisse's application of this term.
[71] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 39.

those "primitive" makers serve as the ideal foil to the over-civilized "modern colorist," and the proof is in the visible manifestations of sincerity in the former group's work.

In both texts, but to a greater degree in "Chinese Dolls" because of its preoccupation with style and technique, Weber made value judgments about various types of works of art based on their apparent sincerity and genuineness of expression. Near the end of the first paragraph of "Chinese Dolls" Weber also invoked the name of Cézanne. Weber compared the works of modern color painters unfavorably to both the work of Cézanne and that of a "primitive" toymaker, writing,

> [T]he purely colored doll, with its intense and really beautiful color and form, is nothing but a pleasing toy, while a Cézanne or a Renoir, with its marvelously rare and saturated, yet grey colored forms, is a masterpiece, and a very unpretentious one.—I'll take a Cézanne and keep my Chinese doll"[72]

Weber's deliberate juxtaposition of "primitive" objects with Fauve paintings, and with paintings by Cézanne and Renoir—modern artists who were held in high esteem by Weber and his contemporaries—is an intriguing one. The implications of this comparison for our understanding of Weber's engagement with primitivism will be discussed in subsequent chapters. For now interpretations of this statement will be limited to its relationship to Weber's arguments about the primacy of plastic form in painting.

Weber's exultation of Cézanne in this way is indebted to Matisse, who wrote of the "order and clarity" of the outward structure of Cézanne's paintings.[73] Through this compositional order, Matisse identified a sense of "structural awareness and feeling for

[72] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.
[73] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 37.

synthesis, a realization of the enduring qualities behind objects.[74] In remembering his time under the tutelage of Matisse, Weber explained that his teacher "unfailingly" drew his students' attention to Cézanne's "archetonic and masonic plasticity."[75] Of course Weber also had his memories of soirees that he had attended at the Stein apartment in Paris, evenings frequently punctuated by Leo Stein offering lengthy discourses on Cézanne.[76] Weber, in fact, recalled that it was at Leo and Gertrude Stein's apartment at 27 rue des Fleurus where he saw his first Cézanne, probably shortly after his arrival in the French capital in 1905.[77] So too, Weber had attended the great Cézanne retrospective held at the Salon d'Automn*e* in 1907, where he would have seen the most chronologically and stylistically expansive display of Cézanne's works yet assembled.

In particular, it was Cézanne's establishment of mass through spatial tensions and balances that appealed highly to Leo Stein. His teacher and close friend Bernard Berenson conditioned Stein's sensitivity to these aspects of Cézanne's art. Indeed, it was Berenson who first introduced Stein to Cézanne's work when Stein visited him in Florence in 1900.[78] Matisse, Stein, Berenson, and Weber perceived the sculptural qualities of Cézanne's color construction, using these qualities and Cézanne's radical simplifications of form to locate his originality of conception upon the canvas. So to, it was through Cézanne's work that these critics and artists found the clearest visual

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[74] Quoted from Flam's commentary of Matisse's "Notes of a Painter" in *Matisse on Art*, 25.
[75] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 70-1.
[76] Gary Tinterow with Marci Kwon, "Leo Stein before 1914," in *The Steins Collect: Matisse, Picasso and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (San Francisco Museum of Art, 2012), 78.
[77] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 64-65.
[78] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 76.

explanation of the "plastic," a term new to the discourses around art in the early twentieth century, that had great impact on the development of art theory and criticism. "Plasticity" in this context can be generally defined as the perception of concrete material form in painting through attention to textures and the three-dimensional qualities of form, especially volume and depth. Berenson saw expression of plasticity, the sensations of touch and movement, as "essential qualities" that give "life-communicating power" to a picture.[79]

Writers on both sides of the Atlantic turned to the term "plastic" to describe the solid, palpable forms that Cézanne constructed. His analytic visions, which pared forms down to their essential elements, impressed artists like Emile Bernard and his close compatriot Maurice Denis, who lauded Cézanne's ability to "[assemble] colors and forms without any literary preoccupation." This type of thinking, which elevates the formal elements of a picture over narrative structure, finds its roots in the work of nineteenth-century philosophers like Taine, Comte, Littré, and others. These men were committed to positivism and advocated for direct observation of the visible world as the means of generating valid knowledge.[80] The study of perception became increasingly important in their work, and they developed theories that visual phenomena could arouse certain tactile and muscular responses in the viewer, the type of physical responses artists associated with "plastic form."

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[79] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 76.

[80] Shiff provides a useful history of the roots of the nineteenth-century roots of the twentieth-century discourse on form, see Chapters 3 and 4 in Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*.

In 1907 Denis published what was perhaps the first significant writing on Cézanne's oeuvre and the language he uses is rich with the new critical jargon. He refers to the older painter's works as "plastic expressions" or, in other words, concrete objects directly representative of sensorial experience.[81] Roger Fry translated this article into English by 1910, but even before that American thinkers had engaged with the concept of "plasticity" in a line that extends from Emerson and Whitman up to Leo Stein. As Kyle has argued convincingly, the salience of this concept in American academic circles had a noticeable impact on the development of American early modernist art and criticism. She describes the "imagistic language" developed by Emerson and Whitman, pointing out how Whitman "valorizes" sensations both visual and tactile in his writings, while both writers use the "plastic" to connote the forces of nature and a sort of raw physicality. [82] These emphases on nature and direct experience, and more importantly the new language that they espoused, help set the stage for artists and critics to explore plasticity.

Kyle has suggested that an important link used by Weber to bring together Stein, Berenson, and the Transcendentalists could have been William James, whose *Principles of Psychology* brought together Ralph Waldo Emerson's metaphysics with logical empiricism.[83] James's theories impressed both Stein and Berenson; Berenson later praised James's ideas as foundational to his own theories and credited James with developing the term "tactile values" to describe the physical properties of objects that

[81] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 238.
[82] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 42-43.
[83] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 69.

incite bodily response through visual stimulation.[84] James' argument suggests a unity between object and subject through perception and explained the relational character of thought, stressing that consciousness is a dynamic process that constantly alters the contents of the human mind. For James, as for Matisse, Stein, Denis, and Weber, the artistic process is a selective one, with the artist choosing between, in James' words, "subjective sensations," while at the same time rejecting "all tones, colors, [and] shapes that do not harmonize with each other and with the main purpose of his work."[85]

James wrote that the "felt object has a plastic reality and outwardness which the imagined object wholly lacks."[86] Weber's intense interest in form and matter, revealed through his admiration of Cézanne's treatment of subject matter in his paintings, suggests that he was sensitive to James's theories, and had probably come to understand them rather well through his associations with Leo Stein. Yet, the inseparable bond Weber forged between matter and spirit, and his understanding of the creative process as one in which the artist instills some of his own essence to his creation, suggests the direct influence of Emerson as well as that of Carpenter, whose ideas were discussed above.[87] Weber cited Emerson's *Essays* as a fundamental text, remembering it among the most

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[84] Berenson was quoted as saying "I owe everything to William James, for I was already applying his theories to the visible world. 'Tactile values' was really James' phrase, not mine, although he never knew he had invented it." Reproduced in Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 76. The source of this quotation is Henry Fitch Taylor's published interviews with Berenson, "The Summons of Art: Conversations with Bernard Berenson," *The Atlantic Monthly* 200.5 (November 1957): 124.
[85] William James, "Stream of Thought," in *The Principles of Psychology,* 2 vols. (1890; New York;; Dover Publications, Inc., 1950), 287.
[86] James, "Imagination," in *Principles of Psychology*, in vol. 2, *Principles*, 70.
[87] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 276.

important reading he had done as a young man.[88] For Emerson works of art succeed when they "exhilarate . . . awakening in the beholder the same sense of universal relation and power which the work envinced [sic] in the artist."[89] Weber expressed a similar sentiment when he wrote, "detecting or sensing quality in a work of art is like finding an answer to seeking oneself . . . it is then that we feel our relationship to the universe."[90]

The artist's goal became to combine concepts, to draw as many relations between objects, viewers, and the artist as possible. It is through these relations, rendered in terms of art form, that the individual comes to know the essential truths of nature. This is plastic expression for Weber: the formal relations of all parts of the painting and their relationship to the whole become paramount, and where those relations are harmoniously composed the universal is revealed. Thus, plastic expression as a process is analogous to James' definition of the relational, and continuous, nature of consciousness and perception. James wrote of the importance of bringing diverse thought-connections together and explained that in that unity "plastic truth" may be found.[91] The plastic truth of a concept rests on its success in "leaning on old truth and grasping at new fact."[92]

Weber may have also leaned on Matisse's teachings as his bridge between Emerson and James, implicitly drawing on Matisse's emphases on emotional self-expression through form and surface design to marry the particularity of James' tactile

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[88] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 48.
[89] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Art," reproduced in Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 283.
[90] Quotation reproduced in Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting, " 283. Sourced from Weber, *Essays on Art,* 8-9.
[91] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 248.
[92] James, "What Pragmatism Means;" quoted in Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 248.

consciousness to Emerson's universal self. For Matisse, the forms of painting represented truths in themselves, having been condensed directly from the artist's experience of nature and then configured into a harmonious composition. Matisse wrote in "Notes of a Painter": "The role of the artist, like that of the scholar, consists of seizing current truths often repeated to him, but which will take on new meaning for him and which he will make his own when he has grasped their deepest significance."[93] The painter, in this context, grasps the significance of truths primarily through his pictorial means that permit him to construct and arrange them. Painting is expressive, not illustrative, and form guides that expression. The thought to be expressed is one and the same to his means of expression, as Matisse wrote: "[T]he thought is worth no more than its expression by the means."[94]

Both "Chinese Dolls" and the Fourth Dimension essay reveal that Weber developed a fascination with form and painterly means similar to that expressed by Matisse above. In "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" Weber explained that in actuality, it is impossible to approach the "ideal" or the "visionary" without form; "Life and its visions can only be realized and made possible through matter."[95] Weber further asserts, "Even thought is matter. It is all matter of things, real things or earth or matter."[96] Weber's blending of Emerson and James, not to mention Carpenter, along with Matisse comes across here in a number of ways, first of all of

[93] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 39.
[94] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 35-6.
[95] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[96] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

course through the proposed unity between matter realized through art form and deep self-expression. The work of the artist is thus a constant act of mediation between physical means, the individual temperament, and the experience of various external phenomena. Weber's belief in the unity of spirit and matter and his belief in the unity of form and expression are two key premises that have been elaborated on in this chapter because they will inflect his interests in the various "primitive" forms discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 2: *"Chinese Dolls": Toys, Play. Primitivism and Artistic Creation*

> I have seen Chinese dolls, Hopi Katcina [sic.] images, and also Indian quilts and baskets, and other work of savages, much finer in color than the works of the modern painter-colorists.[97]

With this statement Weber began "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists," his rebuke of Fauve painting, made without attacking Matisse directly. By so doing, Weber was able to appropriate Matisse's theories for American discourses on form and expression while effectively distancing himself from the most well-known and widely discussed aspects of Matisse's reputation in New York around 1910. Yet, the expanded reading of the text offered in the last chapter still accounts for more or less half of the content alluded to in the article's title, that is, only the "modern colorists." Attention will now shift to Weber's choice of Chinese dolls and other objects of "primitive" manufacture as a counterpoint to current advanced art.

In his text Weber is completely preoccupied with style and technique, as the bulk of the article is spent chastising modern painters for their overly decadent means of expression. Nowhere in "Chinese Dolls" does Weber describe a style or means of expression that could serve as an antidote to this self-indulgent painting. However, he does provide examples of other types of material production, both artistic and artisanal, that for him represented authentic plastic expression. Works by Cézanne and Renoir represent this ideal in the canon of Western art, while "Chinese dolls, Hopi Katcina [sic] images, and also Indian quilts and baskets" exemplify it in the tradition of artisanal craft.

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[97] Weber, "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists," 51.

Yet, even as Weber praises the genuineness of expression in the latter group of objects, he pejoratively classifies this value judgment by referring to such things as the "works of savages." Such language, while shocking to the later scholar, was commonly used in the early twentieth century in discussing the material culture of non-Western peoples. Weber's arguments against modern painting in this text hinge a great deal on his understanding of discourses of the "primitive" and of primitivism because these provided him with alternatives, on one hand, to the over-civilized and insincere that he ascribed to the personality of the modern color painter, and on the other, to the superficiality of the most advanced artistic techniques and styles.

The primary focus of this chapter, then, will be to explore how Weber employed these complex streams of thought in "Chinese Dolls" to build his case against the "modern colorists." I begin with an analysis of Weber's choice of Chinese dolls as foils to certain types of contemporary painting, while at the same time he sets them up as worthy of the same appreciation as one would accord to paintings by Cézanne. In each of these comparisons Weber engaged the same specific strain of primitivism that emphasized the engagement of the "primitive" with the world as analogous to that of the child. In the contemporary critical literature Cézanne's works, as well as those by Matisse and Weber's close friend Henri Rousseau, were often spoken about in terms of their childlike. Once Weber's attraction to the doll form and its association with childlike imagination and play has been elucidated, I will turn to Weber's interest in the decorative qualities of these "pleasing toys" and other objects. Tracing Weber's interest in the decorative qualities of "primitive" art leads back to the teachings of Matisse, and, further,

to those of Arthur Wesley Dow, Weber's first instructor in art making and art history. Exploring the theoretical framework at work in "Chinese Dolls" will allow me to offer new insights on Weber's painting through examinations of his still-lifes and landscapes of 1910.

TROPES OF CHILDHOOD AND THE "NOBLE SAVAGE"

In "Chinese Dolls" "primitive" making is set up to be an antidote for the narcissistic strain that Weber diagnosed in Fauvism. In the above epigraph, Weber unfavorably compared the work of "modern painter colorists" to that of "savages," and Weber further argued: "Yet the dolls were very modest and quiet about their color, not to speak of their makers; and their makers knew they were making dolls and toys and were satisfied with that."[98] Here Weber is drawing on the well-known trope of the "noble savage," which held "primitive" cultures to be time capsules preserving the so-called "childhood of man" by emphasizing the assumed simplicity and naïveté of such makers.[99] Early twentieth-century anthropological thought and evolutionary theories supported this belief, explaining that all non-Western cultures were at less advanced stages of cognitive and social development than those occupied by Euro-American societies.

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[98] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51. Susan Rather has pointed out that Weber's syntax here is somewhat strange. Other scholars, including Willard Bohn, have often noted irregularities and awkwardness in Weber's writing that they usually attribute to the fact that English was not his first language. In my own readings of Weber's texts, I have chosen to operate under this assumption as well.

[99] For recent discussion of the allying the child and the "primitive," see Christopher Turner, "Childhood Regained: Art Toys for Children" in *Toys of the Avant-Garde*. (Museo Picasso Malaga, 2011), 299-311. Turner follows closely in the footsteps of Jonathan Fineburg, who wrote an seminal essay on modern artists' interest in children's art. See Fineburg, "The Post Man Did It," in J. Fineburg, ed. *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1997), 2-27.

In keeping with this belief, non-Western peoples were both infantilized and feminized, characterized as slaves to their own base impulses and desires.[100] In this view they were seen to lack the Enlightenment-wrought rationality of European peoples and thus, like children, experienced the world solely through their physical senses without any ability to reflect, abstract or synthesize that experience into a coherent visual representation. By their very innocence, "primitive" peoples could be translated into "noble savages" who were untainted by the ills and decadent modernity, thus reflecting back to their popularly imagined placement at the "childhood of man." Art historian Frances Connelly has argued that these deeply racist and sexist ideas reduced the material production of "primitive" peoples to "spontaneous outburst[s] of emotion or fantasy."[101]

Artists of Weber's generation located a new vitality and freshness in children's art, choosing to see sincerity in the flat color patterns and simplified forms that proliferate in this type of art. Some fifty years before Weber's article went to print, Charles Baudelaire wrote in *The Painter of Modern Life*, "A child sees everything in a state of newness, genius is nothing more nor less than childhood regained at will, and Cézanne is said to have quipped to Emile Bernard in 1904 that "[he] would like to be a child."[102] Children were believed to see the world with an unaffected objectivity that was inseparable from their physical response and the things they made were seen as indexing that response, an idea stemming from Enlightenment thinking. This belief is analogous to

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[100] Antliff and Leighton, "Primitive,"170-84.

[101] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason*, 19.

[102] Both of these quotations are reproduced in Turner, "Childhood Regained," in his introduction to the relationship between interest in toys and children's art and the growing interest in "primitive art."

the characterization of the "primitive" man's perception of the world and his visual representations of it. As discussed in the last chapter, Weber and his contemporaries placed a great premium on sincerity and spontaneity of expression, so it is no surprise that he would want to engage the widely held dual fascinations with the child and the primitive. Christopher Turner wrote that the coupling of these two strands of thought turned children into "homegrown noble savages," a characterization which finds its roots in the condescending racial language and evolutionary thought discussed above.[103]

In his *Essays on Art*, published in 1916, Weber makes his awareness of this synthesis quite clear: he suggests that through this act of looking back to its "primitive" origins society could "then, child-like, return, and make a new beginning that may make for a truer modernity and a truer modern art."[104] The experience of childhood became for Weber a universal and "primitive" aspect embedded within hyper-refined Western life that could be reengaged through communion with certain types of objects. Weber makes this position explicit with a question to the reader: "Are our children merely our offspring, or are they our spiritual reproductions of our noblest spirit-selves?"[105] This later text provides an interesting comparison to "Chinese Dolls," providing a more extensive and synthesized treatment of the interrelation between the child and the "primitive." In this way Weber's comments in the *Essays* help illuminate his specific

[103] Turner, "Childhood Regained," 299.
[104] Max Weber, *Essays on Art* (New York: W.E. Rudge, 1916), 22.
[105] Weber, *Essays on Art*, 21.

attraction to the doll-form and "pleasing toy[s]," as he argued against the narcissism of modern painting, declaring, "I'll take a Cézanne and keep my Chinese doll."[106]

To understand this uncanny interest to the doll, discussion will now turn briefly toward Walter Benjamin's writings on children's toys and play. Benjamin's meditations on toys and his childhood in Berlin at the turn of the twentieth century reveal a profound fascination with the material world similar to Weber's, though expressed under very different circumstances some two decades later. In fact, many of Benjamin's ideas find their roots in the intellectual milieus Weber inhabited in the 1910s and thus a brief examination of them will assist in decoding Weber's deployment of the doll in his text. Benjamin's vignettes of his childhood emphasized the relationship of his younger self to things as wholly mimetic. He engaged objects with all his senses and thus became "enveloped in the world of matter."[107] Weber, influenced by Emerson, James, and Carpenter, believed that "[e]ven thought is matter" and proposed of the various spiritual and conscious benefits of casting a "penetrating eye" into the world of things.[108] This "penetrating eye" belongs to the receptive artist, but it is analogous to the eye of the "primitive" and that of the child, since both perceive of the world in a manner largely unhampered by the constraints of social mores and purely rational thinking.

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[106] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.
[107] Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 99.
[108] For "Even thought is matter" see Weber's "Fourth Dimension," 25; and for discussion of the "Pène trating eye" see *Essays on Art,* 32.

Benjamin praised toys of simple and self-evident manufacture; he believed that "children naturally understood primitively produced objects."[109] He looked to the material traces of preindustrial society in Germany and Russia, celebrating dolls made of straw and wood, toy soldiers, and even a rudimentary toy sewing machine. For Benjamin, children derived pleasure in play partly through imagining how their toys were made, praising handmade toys as conducive to this imagining due to their simplicity of design and use of traditional materials, especially wood and fabric.[110] Pleasure in play also came from the activation of imaginative faculties, which came more readily to children through the subtle stimulation of these simple toys.[111] Play was essentially a mimetic activity according to Benjamin; children acted out of a compulsion to be made "similar" to their material surroundings.[112] This was especially true in the home, where every thing became a special "mask" for the child to wear that allow him to "distort" himself—to make himself into anything but his own image.[113]

In *The Art of Creation* Edward Carpenter espoused a view of children's interaction with the material world similar to Benjamin's, and Carpenter's comments may have stimulated Weber's thinking on the subject. Carpenter observed that at the point in a

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[109] Walter Benjamin, "Russian Toys," in *Moscow Diary,* ed. Gary Smith, trans. Robert Sieburth, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 123.
[110] Benjamin, "Russian Toys," 123-4; Walter Benjamin, "The Cultural History of Toys," in Michael Jennings, ed. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings vol. 2: 1927-1934* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 114-15.
[111] Benjamin, "Cultural History of Toys," 114.
[112] See "The Mummerrehlen" for further discussion of this impulse in Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 130-134. See also Walter Benjamin, "Toys and Play," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings vol. 2: 1927-193*4, 120.
[113] See "Hiding Places" in Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood*, for further discussion of masks and distortion (99-100).

child's conscious development when they start to become conscious of themselves as subjects, "the child ascribes 'selves' also to toys, stones, and what we call inanimate things."[114] At this stage the appearance of the subject in consciousness occurs "simultaneously" with the appearance of the object and there is little differentiation between the two. It is this confusion between object and subject that leads to the ascribing of "selves" onto both material objects and to other people; "[t]he child feels not only (as we do) that there is a personality behind the appearance of its mother, but that there is something behind these stocks and stones, and personifies them also."[115] Carpenter offers a vivid description of the materiality of the doll and the child's reaction to it,

> Think of the passionate love and admiration, the veritable ecstasy, which the little girl feels at the sight of its friz-haired, blue-eyed babe. The latter's waxen nose has long been melted away by the fire, and the sawdust has run out of its legs; but that makes no difference. It is still the doll.[116]

Carpenter, like Weber and Benjamin, is not necessarily concerned with investing meaning in any specific type of material or elevating any style of representation over the other, but rather he focuses on the fundamental power of the doll form to elicit emotional and imaginative engagement from the beholder, in this case the child.

Returning to Weber's description of Chinese dolls as "modest and quiet about their color, and not to speak of their makers," one sees the same emphases on simplicity and artisanal quality that appealed to Benjamin and to Carpenter. Though it is hard to locate with any exactitude the visual sources that Weber had access to, but the American

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[114] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 56.
[115] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 56.
[116] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 185.

Museum of Natural History had acquired a massive collection of Chinese artifacts from Bernard Laufer's expedition to China in 1903-1904, including a number of dolls and marionette puppets (figs. 1, 2, 3).[117] Through their relatively straightforward construction and self-evident use materials that were not usually associated with high art in the West—such as animal hides, thread, wire, and mud or clay—dolls like those seen in figures two and three represented to Weber an example of material production rooted deeply in the everyday experience of a culture outside of his own. Weber was a frequent visitor to the Museum of Natural History after his return from Paris in 1908 and later in life he recalled the deep connection he felt for the objects there, referring to them as the "dearest friends I had in America."[118]

In 1910 Weber produced a number of still-lifes and gouache drawings that reveal the intimacy he felt toward these objects. Looking at *Mexican Statuette,* for instance, the closely cropped composition and Cézannesque upturned tabletop bring the viewer into a close proximity with the subject, a Native American Cochiti figurine flanked by a pot from the Zuni Pueblo of New Mexico (fig. 4). Weber's more well-known gouache, *African Statuette*, is even more tightly composed, with the rather small figurine coming to dominate the pictorial space (fig. 5). The statuette in this case is a Yaka figurine from Niger, which Weber had purchased in Paris. A 1916 photograph by Clara Sipprell shows Weber in deep contemplation of the figurine, suggesting its continued importance to him even eight years after his return to New York (fig. 6). This photograph and the two

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[117] "Asian Ethnographic Collection" and "Laufer China Expedition," American Museum of Natural History, amnh.org; first accessed November 11th, 2014.
[118] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 510.

gouache drawings suggest the highly personal nature of Weber's response to "primitive" objects that is related to scale and tactility, to the ability to handle these objects.

In her notes on the inaugural Matisse class, Sarah Stein—who studied alongside Weber—reported on the importance that Matisse placed on being able to handle sculptures. The fauve master instructed his students; "In addition to the sensations one derives from a drawing, a sculpture must invite us to handle it as an object; just so the sculptor must feel, in making it, the particular demands for volume and mass."[119] Weber, too, remembered that Matisse's instruction centered around this type of direct physical engagement, he explained that "[Matisse] would take a figurine in his hands, and point out to us [its] authentic and instinctive sculpturesque qualities."[120] This delight in intimate, figurative work that could be easily manipulated brings to mind Weber's interest in the doll, which held connotations of physical engagement through play.

But beyond materiality, the doll can be seen as important to Weber because of its role as a stimulus to the child's imaginative and emotional faculties. As a child Weber had spent a great deal of time in his uncle's carpentry shop, observing goings-on with "great interest" and making his own toys.[121] His descriptions of his childhood are punctuated by sensorial impressions. He recalled watching his grandfather transform fabrics by dipping them in "buckets of color" and later the impression of "the power of the water" as he rode a ferry for the first time in New York after crossing the Atlantic.[122]

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[119] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 550.
[120] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 74-75.
[121] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 1.
[122] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 1-2, 11.

In reflecting on all these memories, Weber explained the workings of his young mind, saying that the child's mind "is mobile . . . and becomes an inhabitant of the tide and the time and the environment that it brings."[123] This notion is quite similar to Benjamin's assertion of the child's interaction with the world as essentially mimetic: through his unbridled imagination the child is able to "distort" himself, to use Benjamin's term, into closer communion with the world around him. The toy or doll is a special kind of catalyst for this engagement, urging the child to make and remake itself and himself along the lines of his physical and emotional response to it.

In this sense, the toy is not unlike the work of art within Weber's metaphysical and psychological understanding of its effect on the viewer. As Jill Kyle observed, James's empiricism and Emerson's experiential mysticism gave artists a new and "daring experimental approach" to expression "in which objective visual relationships, simply by generating new experiences, became subjective."[124] What Leo Stein described as the "endless upending gripping of form" in a Cézanne painting like *Five Apples*—the sense of perpetual movement and insistent plasticity the painter created through his overlapping and intersecting planes—continually excites tactile sensations in the viewer and thus remakes itself before the viewer as a child's toy does during play (fig. 7).[125] Julius Meier-Graefe wrote a brief diary entry about what he saw at the Cézanne retrospective of 1907, noting the "childish, unskilled, toy-like compositions," and declaring unequivocally, "No

[123] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 10.
[124] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 73.
[125] Stein quote reproduced from Tinterow, "Leo Stein before 1914," 76.

one before Cézanne so carelessly elevated the ideal of naïve expression."[126] These two individual responses are symptomatic of a larger trend in the discussion of Cézanne that tended to characterize both his aforementioned compositional structure, which lent itself to non-illusionistic distortion, and his distinctive hatched brushstroke, which often left areas of canvas bare, as child-like because these aspects of Cézanne's work signaled to critics a crudity and lack of finish (fig. 7).

Matisse's early Fauve experiments were also discussed in this way, as discussed in chapter one. Gelett Burgess likened Fauve color and paint handling to what "a particularly sanguinary little girl of eight, half-crazed with gin, would do to a whitewashed wall, if left alone with a box of crayons" in the New York press just before Weber published "Chinese Dolls."[127] For Weber, crudity and lack of finish were to be admired because they encapsulated spontaneity and suggested genuine expression. So too, the non-illusionistic elements of Cézanne's style could be seen as activating the imagination through their departure from nature. In her fastidious notes on the Matisse class, Sarah Stein recorded that Matisse encouraged his students to embrace their personal sensibilities in representing their subjects, but the master cautioned that any distortion that may result "should be in accordance with the character of the model."[128] Matisse explained that the painter "must bring knowledge, much contemplation [of the

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[126] Meier-Graefe quotation reproduced from Beat Wismer, "Shaking Hands Across the Centuries: El Greco and Early Modernism in Germany" in *El Greco and Modernism* (Düsseldorf: Museum Kunstpalast, 2012), 159.
[127] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 27.
[128] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 550.

subject], and the imagination to enrich what he sees."[129] These admonitions are in keeping with the theories of plastic expression discussed in the last chapter and are included here to underscore the importance that Weber and his contemporaries placed on understanding how artworks could excite and engage the mind and body. Contemplation of toys and children's art was an important corollary to this research and one that Weber relies upon to make his critique of certain types of avant-garde painting in "Chinese Dolls."

Much has been said here of what is child-like about Cézanne, yet Weber had an even more potent and present example of childlike naïveté in Henri Rousseau, also known as the Douanier, with whom he had become close friends during his years in Paris. Weber had actually purchased a number of Rousseau paintings, which he brought back to New York along with his little Picasso still life and his African statuette (figs. 5 and 8). In 1910 Stieglitz staged an exhibition of Rousseau's work at '291,' and Weber not only loaned a number of his own Rousseau paintings to the show, but he also wrote the introduction to the catalogue. Weber's introduction stands a touching tribute to Rousseau, who had died earlier that year,

> He was truly naïve and personal; a real "Primitive" in our living in our time. He loved nature passionately and painted as he saw it. His larger work is fantastic and decorative and recalls Giotto and other primitives. He lived a life of simplicity and purity, the spirit of which dominates his work.[130]

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[129] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 550.

[130] Sandra Leonard reproduced Weber's catalog introduction for the show, see Leonard, *Henri Rousseau and Max Weber* (New York: R.L. Feigen 1970), 48.

In Rousseau's work Weber appreciated the artist's ability to express his sensations with sincerity. The "larger work[s]" that Weber refers to are Rousseau's jungle paintings, such as *The Dream*, where Rousseau's forms are painted in highly controlled brushwork with an eye to clean, almost hard-edged contours (fig. 9). It is clear that in Rousseau's reductive approach to form Weber appreciated the same so-called "crudeness and brutality" that he ascribed to other "primitive" representations.

None of the jungle paintings were shown in the '291' exhibition, and Weber owned only a number of the painter's earlier, small-scale landscape and figure compositions. Looking to Rousseau's *Study for the View of Malakoff, Outskirts of Paris* from 1908, which Weber had in his collection, one sees more of the type of "crudeness" that Weber would have associated with the childlike or "primitive" (fig. 10). Paint is applied liberally in wide and simple strokes and the small human figures that populate this street scene are rendered in largely unmodulated daubs of black paint and seem of a much smaller scale than the buildings and electrical poles around them. Rousseau also had a predilection for painting children with toys, one such work entitled *Child with a Puppet*, displays the same close-up composition that Weber used in many of his still-lifes and gouaches drawings such as *Mexican Statuette* (figs. 4, 11). Weber praised the deep feeling that Rousseau's works communicated, citing the artist's formal distortions and simple paint handling as the manifest presence of "the deepest meaning of what we call intimacy, human intimacy."[131] In Rousseau's painting, Weber found imagination, playfulness, and a "unique" and penetrating vision that brought hinted at the childlike

[131] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 227.

innocence that Weber sensed in Rousseau's personality. Weber's daughter Joy remembers her father frequently taking time to contemplate his small canvases, repeating the words "Beautiful, just beautiful."[132]

Weber produced a number of landscape paintings in 1910 show the stylistic influence of Rousseau, both in their color and in technique. In a landscape of 1910, now in the University of Reading Collection, Weber relies on a jewel-like palette of greens, browns, blues and hints of yellow that in their intensity, are reminiscent of Rousseau's jungle scenes (fig. 12). Two other untitled landscapes from the same year employ a more limited palette of rich greens and browns, but retain a similar sense of intensity (figs. 13, 14). The visual impact of these colors suggests the innocent, childlike vision that Weber ascribed to Rousseau, emphasizing directness and unmediated experience of nature. While the palette corresponds with that of Rousseau's later work, the lack of firm contours recall works like the earlier Paris scene that Weber had in his collection. Of course, *Landscape I* and *Landscape II* also owe a clear debt to Cézanne, whose characteristic paint handling, defined by short parallel strokes, predominates in both scenes and suggests physical coarseness. Weber's gouache drawing *African Statuette* employs a similar coarseness, meant to recall the roughness of the figurine's wooden body, the bodily force with which it was carved, and the strength of the initial sensorial impression that the maker received from viewing his subject (fig. 5).

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[132] This anecdote was shared by Joy Weber in a personal communication, see Ireson, "Max Weber and the 'Lessons' of Rousseau and Matisse," 52.

There is no mention in "Chinese Dolls" of Rousseau, yet Weber does seem to have been thinking through certain elements of the Douanier's style and technique in his own painting at the time. Weber could also have looked to the ever-present example of Cézanne's work for similar qualities. Looking at Cézanne's *Large Bathers* for instance, the painter's repetitive hatched brushstroke, dense compositional structure, and the presence of bare areas of canvas might also have appeared to Weber as childlike (fig. 15). Kyle has observed Weber found a "dual appeal" in Cézanne's paintings; seeing the painter's unique style as uniting both color and form through the juxtaposition of areas of blank canvas and unblended brushstrokes of pure color that make up forms.[133] These prominent differences in texture, according to Kyle, appeal to touch and sight, At this point, we can start to better understand Weber's stated allegiance to the doll and to Cézanne's paintings. Each is an object that stimulates the mind and body through qualities of form, that is, their *plasticity*.

Weber used these examples as foils to illustrate how works by the "modern painter colorists" stymie activation of the senses and thus the imagination because of their lack of plastic form and overemphasis on brushwork and explosively bright color. The toy is a catalyst for imaginative engagement; it invites response, as do the "rare" and "unpretentious" works of Cézanne and Renoir. Weber's statement in "Chinese Dolls" that he would "take a Cézanne and keep [his] Chinese doll" reveals his own belief in the catalytic power of these objects, which he sets up as worthy of a special kind of appreciation impossible to afford to certain modern painting. Here Weber celebrates the

[133] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 42-43.

childlike and the "primitive" to offer an alternative mode of reception to art that privileges a multi-sensory physical response alongside a genuine emotional connection.

Appreciation of Art and Objects

If in Weber's argument the painting is to be taken as something analogous to the toy for its ability to activate the imagination and generate new experiences, it should also be noted that the toy in this case is something made *for* children, not necessarily *by* them. Weber explained as much when he wrote "their [the dolls'] makers knew they were making dolls and toys and were satisfied with that." Perhaps this distinction is meant to suggest an additional layer of meaning: if the painting is something analogous to the toy, than the painter is somehow similar to the toymaker. To explore this notion further, it is necessary to pull back from focusing on the Chinese dolls and look at the "Hopi Katcina [sic] images, and also Indian quilts and baskets, and other work of savages" that Weber judged to be superior to the work of "modern painter colorists."

Here Weber has chosen objects generally designated in European hierarchies of material production as craft—figurines, baskets, and quilts—and juxtaposed them to paintings by Cézanne and Renoir. In his Fourth Dimension text Weber goes on at length about sculpted and carved objects such as "Tanagra, Egyptian, or Congo statuette[s]," praising their visual impact that "gives the impression of a colossal statue."[134] Weber explains here, "a form at its extremity still continues reaching out into space if it is imbued with intensity and energy;" that power is present for Weber because of their

[134] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

extreme stylization in comparison to Western notions of realism.[135] Given the apparent power Weber felt in African tribal sculpture, it is worth exploring why his ultimate disavowal of Fauvism is made through comparisons to Chinese dolls, Hopi Kachinas, and other objects described in much more modest terms than the aforementioned sculptures.

This question may be answered by Weber's interest in craft: had a great respect for craft production, which he made clear in his 1916 *Essays on Art*. He wrote an entire chapter entitled "Things," in which he argued for the aesthetic and spiritual value of well-crafted everyday objects:

> As a nail, or a screw, or a bolt is essential and is a part of a whole machine, so is every simple thing a part of the whole spiritual, living, moving cosmos. I would much rather be able to shape things on the anvil, or in the kiln, or to make a table or cabinet, or to design a public hall, or theatre, than to be a lecturer on the history of literature or of the arts and crafts.. For words themselves are nothing, they are an abstract equivalent of things.[136]

For Weber creation is a process of giving concreteness to the universal spiritual truths of existence, and the best manifestations of these truths are the ones that are made honestly, "quietly" through traditional craft production.[137] Weber recalled that the years he spent working and watching in his uncle's workshop imparted to him a "religious reverence and respect for creative manual work."[138] In part, this reverence stemmed from the fact that Weber's uncle's shop was transformed into a synagogue where friends and neighbors gathered for religious observances, including the weekly Sabbath, that were presided over by Weber's uncle himself. Making became in some ways essential; Weber wrote in the

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[135] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[136] Weber, *Essays on Art*, 35.
[137] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 22.
[138] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 2-3.

Essays that man is "an instinctively industrious animal" and the products of his labor come to contain something of his life; the spiritual and physical energies that he imparted the object through his making.[139] Here Weber is thinking back to plastic expression, and he demonstrates this concept through a comparison between a "useful table" and "one that is fine in proportion and at the same time useful."[140] To live with the first is to "live with so much useful lumber made to serve the purpose of a table," while to live with the second table is to "live with the spirit of the maker."

From 1898 to 1900 Weber studied at the Pratt Institute under Arthur Wesley Dow, who no doubt also played a crucial role in Weber's growing appreciation of craft. By the time that Weber entered Pratt, Dow had developed an approach to instruction that he termed his "natural method."[141] This method was set up to liberate latent "primitive streams of thought" through cultivating his students' appreciation for "primitive" art and through different types of making, from drawing exercises that emphasized spatial relations to basket weaving.[142] Students were directed to "put [themselves] in the place of the ancient worker by affecting a primitive state of mind" and Dow continually encouraged them to look back to nature.[143] In formulating his "natural method" Dow drew heavily on the ethnological hypotheses of his friend Frank Hamilton Cushing, whose cultural epoch theory held that "the individual re-experiences the developmental

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[139] Weber, *Essays on Art*, 35.
[140] Weber, *Essays on Art*, 34.
[141] Sylvester Baxter wrote an article in 1903 that provided an extensive account of Dow's "natural method" after having observed it in action at the Ipswich Summer Art School where Dow taught during the summer vacations of his years at Pratt. See Baxter, "Handicraft and its Extension at Ipswich," in *Handicraft* 1.11 (1903), 249-68.
[142] Baxter, "Handicraft and its Extension at Ipswich," 253.
[143] Baxter, "Handicraft and its Extension at Ipswich," 253.

stages of the human race in acquiring motor skills."[144] In keeping with this theory, Dow's methods of teaching were predicated on the slow acquisition of skills through numerous exercises that often times emphasized a single skill, or compositional element such as line or rhythm, at a time.

DECORATIVE COMPOSITIONS 'PRIMITIVE' AND MODERN

Underlying Dow's and Cushing's emphases on incremental skill acquisition as a means of tapping into latent "primitive" experience was their belief in the universality of creative expression.[145] For Dow, the lessons learned from cultivating aesthetic appreciation and those learned from mastering "the many acts and processes combined in a work of art… one-by-one" would be revealed unconsciously in the act of composing the artwork.[146] Weber would have heard a similar sentiment expressed by Matisse, who also saw the process of artistic creation in part as an intuitive engagement with one's aesthetic education. Sarah Stein recorded that in his discourse on sculpture, Matisse had declared, "You must forget all your theories, all your ideas, before the subject. What part of these is really your own will be expressed in your expression of the emotion awakened

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[144] Jack Rushing drew specific connections between this theory of Cushing's and Dow's pedagogy in his dissertation. See 193-204 in Rushing, "Native American Art and Culture and the New York Avant-garde 1910-1950" (Ph.D. Diss, The University of Texas at Austin, 1989) for a full discussion of Cushing's influence on Dow's teaching and aesthetic theories.

[145] Frederic C. Moffat, *Arthur Wesley Dow* (Washington D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 92-95.

[146] This quotation is drawn from Dow's 1902 book *Composition*, a manual that he wrote for use by art students and teachers. Here Dow is emphasizing the importance of approaching works of art through appreciation of their compositional structure. See Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers,* 13th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 63.

in you be the subject."[147] Here again we are drawn back to thinking about the work of art as a condensation of sensations, the result of the painter's efforts to express his experience of a subject in terms of plasticity.

Yet, equally as important as plasticity in this case is decorative harmony. As Matisse explained in "Notes of a Painter," "Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the diverse elements at the painter's command to express his feelings."[148] Dow also gave composition a key role in his teachings, writing that "[the] study of composition of Line, Mass, and Color leads to appreciation of all forms of art and the beauty of nature."[149] Each of Weber's teachers was deeply concerned with and committed to the elevation of the decorative, which was at the time a pejorative term that was associated with craft. Both Matisse and Dow saw in the decorative and harmonious composition a sense of eternal order represented through self-contained formal relations and two-dimensional surface design. Weber clearly absorbed these lessons, writing in his *Essays on Art,* "in the color and design of Minoan and Persian, Chinese and Indian porcelains, rugs, and paintings, are a source of permanent inspiration" to any maker, for "creation is infinite in time, space, and matter."[150] One might also look back to Weber's comparison of Chinese dolls to Cézanne and Renoir to see similar language:

> [T]he purely colored doll, with its intense and really beautiful color and form, is nothing but a pleasing toy, while a Cézanne or a Renoir, with its marvelously

[147] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 551.
[148] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 36.
[149] Dow, *Composition,* 64.
[150] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 12.

> rare and saturated, yet grey colored forms, is a masterpiece, and a very unpretentious one.—I'll take a Cézanne and keep my Chinese doll.[151]

The tone of Weber's language when he described the doll indicates his appreciation of qualities that were associated with the decorative, as when he praised its "intense and really beautiful color and form."

One of the principal ways that Weber seems to have explored the decorative qualities of "primitive" objects was through painting still-lifes. Between the years of 1910 and 1912 he painted a number of such works incorporating Mesoamerican objects and Southwestern Pueblo motifs. Anne G. Robins has argued that these works, such as *Still Life with Duck* and *Still Life No. 2*, represent the "back-to-basics" approach to composition and design that Weber espoused in "Chinese Dolls" (figs. 16, 17).[152] Matisse had placed great value on still-life painting as a crucial testing-ground for the artist to explore formal and spatial relationships. Sarah Stein recorded Matisse's statement to his students that "a still-life is as difficult as an antique [sculpture] and the proportions of the various parts as important as the proportions of the head or the hands, for instance, of the antique [sculpture]."[153] In both *Still Life with Duck* and *Still Life No. 2* Weber turned to a rich and earthy palette, primarily relying on browns, greens, and muted yellows, that are understated enough to allow the spatial and formal relations to come to the fore.

Weber made many sketches on his trips to the American Museum of Natural history, and he probably relied on these sketches as points of reference back in his studio.

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[151] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.
[152] Robins, "The Company of Strangers," 74-5.
[153] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 552.

From the somber palettes and the extremity of the tilt of the tables in these two works one sees the same sense of intimacy found in Weber's own gouache drawings and that he appreciated in Rousseau. *Still Life with Duck* and *Still Life No. 2* do away with both the high-keyed color of Matisse and the dense crowding of objects and intersecting planes that characterize Cézanne's still lifes. The relatively straightforward presentation of objects in these works by Weber and his uncomplicated spatial arrangements give a sense that he is meditating on these objects, probing them for essences.

Frances Connelly has demonstrated that one of the principal ways that European thinkers assimilated the new form languages they observed in "primitive" art was through theories of ornament, because Europeans found these new forms otherwise unintelligible by their standards of naturalism. [154] The densely geometric patterning of a Hopi Kachina, the elegant enveloping rings of a Zuni pot like the one in the background of *Mexican Statuette*, and the bright patterning of the cloth used for a Chinese doll were interpreted as embodiments of the unfettered imagination of the "primitive;" of caprice and reveling in the materiality of whatever medium he was working in (figs. 1-4, 18-19). In European aesthetics, ornament had always been relegated to the periphery, since it was often associated with imaginative caprice and indulgence. So too, the decorative was disparaged because it was thought to "dodge meaning" through its appeals to the senses. The childlike *naïveté* of the "primitive" meant that he possessed "no means to objectify

[154] See Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* especially chapter 3 "'Primitive' Ornament and the Arabesque: Paul Gauguin's Decorative Art."

his experience and could create neither dramatic narrative nor naturalistic illusion" and thus his work was relegated to the realm of ornament.[155]

In Weber's painting, as we have seen in works like *Still Life with Duck* and *Still Life No. 2*, he adopted an earthy palette to suggest a more meditative air (figs. 16, 17). However, in both of these still-lifes Weber also subtly displays his interest in, and appreciation for, the patterning of Native American pottery. Robins has located a jar in the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian with the same distinctive wedge pattern as the earthenware jar in the foreground of *Still Life with Duck (*fig. 20).[156] The titular duck also displays a simply rendered pattern in the form of two sawtooth lines placed one over the other; Robins has suggested that this may be a sculpture from the Cochiti Pueblo, the origin culture of the titular figurine in Weber's gouache drawing *Mexican Statuette*.[157] The vessel in the right foreground of *Still-life No. 2* displays a similar type of simple geometric patterning to the jar in *Still Life with Duck*, while the other piece of pottery holding the fruit displays a repeated leaf-like motif. These works are not as densely packed with patterns as still-lifes by Matisse, such as *Nature Morte Bleu*, which Weber would have seen at the apartment of Michael and Sarah Stein in Paris; yet they demonstrate Weber's willingness to reflect on and appreciate surface design (fig. 24). Through Dow's teachings Weber likely had gained a great respect for the repetitive geometric patterning of Native American pottery. Dow, through his engagement with

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[155] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 27.
[156] Robins, "The Company of Strangers," 74-5.
[157] Robins, "The Company of Strangers," 74-5.

Cushing's ideas, also appreciated repetition as an outgrowth of deep appreciation for the formal regularities found in nature.

Art historians, anthropologists, and archeologists had become interested in "primitive" decoration because their evolutionary biases led them to see it as a "cultural fossil," possibly the root of artistic expression.[158] Cushing wrote at length about the history and stylistic evolution of Zuni pottery, explaining a "mental bias" that he uncovered in his research that Zuni people "argue[d] [an] actual and essential relationship" between the forms, functions, and designs of their pottery.[159] Thus, the surface pattern and decoration somehow arise out of the processes of making and use. Similarly, Dow believed that the "primitive" first developed "found designs" through close observation of patterning and repetition in nature.[160] The decorative thus carried both positive and negative connotations, as the wellspring of artistic expression and an embodiment of imaginative ingenuity on one hand, while, on the other, representing the limited cognitive faculties of the "primitive." Weber seems to have placed more value on the term for the former connotations, though in "Chinese dolls" his emphasis on toys and other primitive handicrafts indicates his acceptance of the latter; since the spontaneity and sincerity of the expression was contingent on the "primitive" maker's inability to abstract a coherent visual representation from his experience.

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[158] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason*, 55.
[159] Frank Hamilton Cushing, "Origins of Pueblo Pottery," in Jesse Green, ed. *Zuni: Selected Writings of Frank Hamilton Cushing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 227-48. Cushing's research was originally published as "A Study of Pueblo Potter as Illustrative of Zuni Cultural Growth," *Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1882-1883,* (Washington D.C., 1886), 482-92, 510-15.
[160] Moffat, *Arthur Wesley Dow,* 93.

Both Dow and Matisse also tended toward the positive connotations of the connection between the "primitive" and the decorative because of the premium they placed on compositional harmony and sound pictorial design. In his recollections of his time at the Pratt, Weber praised Dow as "a great teacher of the design, the pattern, the two-dimensional as manifested in the greatest examples of Far Eastern art."[161] Perhaps in making his doll Chinese Weber was in part acknowledging Dow's instruction, which had placed compositional harmony and design at the heart of the artist's enterprise. Matisse had similar predilections, Weber recalled that Matisse had made an "invaluable contribution to the blending of the eternal art of the Orient with the twentieth century art of the Western world" through his own insistence on "the mechanics of construction" and "the establishment of oppositions which create the equilibrium."[162] These essential decorative principles could be found in the work of Cézanne as well, Weber recalled how the young artists around him in Paris "sat for hours at a time analyzing Cézanne's color construction and design, these alluring archaic types of beauty and austerity which rehabilitated the art and intrinsic meaning of painting."[163]

Later in his life Weber credited Matisse and the Fauves with helping bring the decorative aspects of Cézanne to light, since the roughness and *gaucherie* of many of Cézanne's late paintings had earned him the epithet of "primitive" amongst critics, he wrote: "Cézanne's unique vision and unexcelled meticulous execution, spiritual values, poetic nuance, and significant gesture were sought for no less than the plastic attributes

[161] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 37.
[162] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 74-5.
[163] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 67.

and values."[164] The decorative was thus considered restorative and an equally necessary concern for the artist also concerned with plasticity and expression. Matisse was a great champion of the affective power of the decorative, a stance he took in "Notes of a Painter" with this now famous proclamation: "What I dream of is an art of balance, purity, and serenity … which could be, for every mental worker … a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue."[165]Here Matisse is relying on the decorative aspects of pictorial design and composition to provide a literal escape from the overstimulation of the modern world; the art calms through its direct appeals to the senses and its dodging of narrative meaning. Looking at Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre,* for example, one can see the painter's application of these theories of the decorative (fig. 21). The composition is dominated by the sumptuous arabesques that define the luxuriating women's bodies, while the principal space is delineated by the sinuous contour lines of the trees in the background. Color is applied in broad strokes that create their own gentle sense of rhythm across the canvas.

Given that "Chinese Dolls" represents Weber's Oedipal distancing himself from Matisse, he would take aim at works like *Bonheur de Vivre* because of their liberal use of color and insistence on decorative flatness. Yet Weber set up his "purely colored" dolls, with their "intense and really beautiful" color to have a similar function, suggesting that their simplicity and directness was refreshing and rejuvenating in the face of the decadence of certain modern colorists. Color held an essential role in both decorative

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[164] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 71.
[165] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 38.

composition and emotional expression for Matisse, and for Weber, as the earlier discussion of his use of color and its relation to sensorial immediacy has suggested. Weber also employed some high-keyed color in still-lifes like *The Blue Pitcher* of 1910 and *Still Life No. 9* of 1912, works which seem of another world from *Still Life With Duck* (figs. 13, 22-23). In *The Blue Pitcher* there is a hint of densely patterned wallpaper that recalls the background of *Mexican Statuette* and this inclusion further suggests Weber did indeed share Matisse's appreciation for decorative pattering (figs. 22, 24). These works also exhibit a brushstroke that calls to mind Cézanne. Weber's deep appreciation for Cézanne's unique, unblended brushstroke that united color and form and freed color from its subordinate, descriptive role has already been discussed here. Yet, it bears mentioning again because it exemplifies how Cézanne's work could be classified as decorative in the same way as Weber might choose to look at a Chinese doll or Hopi Kachina: in all of these he saw the same unity of color, patterning, and essential form that made up his ideal of plastic expression.

Weber and his contemporaries conceived of modern art as, what Marsden Hartley termed, "but a new attachment to things eternal."[166] Later in his life, Weber echoed this sentiment, writing,

> Is there such a thing as modern? The sun rises every morning in the same way as it did millions of years ago. The astronomers can't count how far back, or how far ahead it will rise in the same way, in the same rhythmic rotation of the planets and all.[167]

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166 Marsden Hartley, "1914 Catalogue Statement," in Gail R. Scott, ed. *On Art* (New York: Horizon Press, 1982), 63.
167 "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 516-17.

The fascination with the primitive and *naïf,* which Weber and Hartley shared with many of their contemporaries, came from their deep commitment to revitalizing the art of the present. The new formal languages brought to them through exposure to non-Western art seemed to embody a return to nature, a return to sincerity and authenticity. In his explorations of the childlike and the decorative in "Chinese Dolls" Weber tied together two of the most salient discourses surrounding the "noble savage" and the diverse body of world art that artists were exploring in New York and Paris. His texts suggests a path around the narcissistic strains of modern painting through an embrace of childhood and the imagined "primitive" past (and present) embodied in objects of non-Western material cultures.

Chapter 3: *The Fourth Dimension, Dreams, and Tribal Art*

> The stronger or more forceful the form the more intense is the dream or vision. Only real dreams are built upon. Even thought is matter. It is all the matter of things, real things or earth of matter. Dreams realized through plastic means are the pyramids and temples, the Acropolis and the Palatine structures; cathedrals and decorations; tunnels, bridges, and towers,; these are all of matter in space—both in one and inseparable.[168]

In this passage from "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View," Weber fuses the "real" with the "dream or vision" through "plastic means," that is, through the physical and material traits of matter. In fact, according to Weber, the existence "the ideal dimension," or fourth dimension, "is dependent for its existence upon the three material dimensions." Throughout the essay Weber also refers repeatedly to "dreams" and "visions" and he explains, in no uncertain terms, that such experiences are inseparable from "the observation of things in nature."[169] Weber locates the possibility of experiencing the fourth dimension in this type of observation and offers examples of where a viewer might find this "rare quality" (the fourth dimension) in the plastic arts, pointing specifically to the work of Cézanne, El Greco, Giotto, and further, to Archaic Greek, and African sculpture. Statements such as "A Tanagra, Egyptian, or Congo statuette often gives the impression of a colossal statue. . ." and "The stronger or more forceful the form the more intense is the dream or vision" suggest that Weber was able to locate a particular type of expressive power in the forms of these "primitive" objects, not

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[168] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25

[169] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

unlike that "barborous" strength that Gelett Burgess saw in Picasso's forms and the "primitive grotesques" that inspired them.[170]

Building primarily on the scholarship of Henderson and Bohn, who have both analyzed this text at length to locate it within contemporary discourses of popular science and Edward Carpenter's monist philosophy, this chapter probes Weber's essay for its relationship to the reception of "primitive" art and, particularly, tribal sculpture. Tribal sculpture carried with it particularly powerful associations in European aesthetic philosophies and mysticism. As Frances Connelly has explained, three-dimensional sculpture from Africa (and Oceania) was thought to be the material manifestation of the superstitions and dark desires that characterized the other side of the "primitive" experience, that of the "wild man."[171] I will give new focus to Weber's text by situating it at the intersection of Weber's interests in perceptual psychology, mysticism, higher dimensions, and these popular understandings of tribal sculpture. Paying special attention to the principal traits ascribed by Weber and his contemporaries to "primitive" art—such as qualities of plasticity and imaginativeness—this chapter offers new insights into Weber's own attempts at assimilating "primitive" aesthetics into his figure painting around 1910 to 1911, and sheds light on his strongly material conception of the fourth dimension that, by 1910, was already out of fashion in Parisian circles.

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[170] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25 and Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," 28.
[171] See Chapter 4 in Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* especially 79-85.

ALLYING PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

As discussed in chapter one, in "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" Weber argued for an approach to painting that emphasized tactility and plasticity through evocations of three-dimensionality. Weber believed the fourth dimension to be a physical characteristic of space, which existed independently of art but could be accessed through it:

> A Tanagra, Egyptian, or Congo statuette often gives the impression of a colossal statue, while a poor, mediocre piece of sculpture appears to be the size a pin-head, for it is devoid of this boundless sense of space or grandeur. The same is true of painting and other flat-space arts . . . The ideal dimension is dependent for its existence upon the three material dimensions . . . ."[172]

Coming out of the Parisian milieu of 1908, when the discourse was dominated by the discussion of "plasticity," in both painting and sculpture, Weber was still exploring these ideas in 1910. Weber's "plastic point of view" brings painting, a "flat-space art," and sculpture into close company, and it seems that he is eager to bring some of the innate qualities of sculpture into painting. It is worth delving further into the context of this painting-sculpture analogy through a brief exploration the Parisian avant-garde's similar interest in ideas of sculptural form and painting as these ideas will play a crucial role in the reception of African sculpture discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Weber's memories of the "Matisse Class" and Sarah Stein's notes both reveal that the Fauve painter had encouraged his students to appreciate the plastic value of Cézanne alongside various types of sculpture. He likely also drew on his memories Leo Stein's discussions of Cézanne, but also via Stein's influence, Bernard Berenson's concept of

[172] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25

"tactile values." In the essay, Weber in fact had specifically aligned Cézanne's art with "the best of Assyrian, Egyptian, or Greek sculpture," explaining that in all these works one can perceive "this so-called fourth dimension, the dimension of infinity." Weber's fascination with the "plastic means" and "colored and constructed matter in space and light" in this text seem reminiscent of both Matisse's and of Stein's comments on Cézanne, which celebrated aspects of his painting associated with structure and plasticity. Late in his life Weber would dub Cézanne the "engineer of the geometry of aesthetics," underscoring his own continued fidelity to the laws of composition, referred to by Matisse as "construction," that he learned to appreciate in Cézanne's painting.[173]

Weber recalled that Matisse "insisted upon good and logical construction of the figure, and did not disapprove of the study of anatomy nor the use of a plumb line."[174] Matisse placed a premium on sound pictorial construction, as Weber's first teacher Dow had done, and he directed his students to a diverse corpus of visual material to illustrate these principles,

> In calling our attention to the salient points of the human body, its movements, volume, sculpturesque content and equilibrium he would refer to African Negro sculpture, the great archaic Greece of the 4th and 5th centuries BC, and unfailingly to Cézanne's architectonic and masonic plasticity.[175]

The various emphases here on "volume," mass, "equilibrium," and plasticity seem to have been mainstays of Matisse's instruction, as Sarah Stein's notes also are replete with such references. On the subject of sculpture Matisse instructed his students, "[T]he

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[173]"Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 118.
[174] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 70-71.
[175]"Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 70-71.

mechanics of construction is the establishment of the oppositions which create the equilibrium of the directions," and explained that throughout time the primary concern of the artist was the "essentials of form, the big masses and their relations."[176]

For Matisse, the "essentials of form" could figure just as prominently in the two-dimensional realm of painting as it could in three-dimensional work, the realm of sculpture. Weber operated on a similar premise in his article, which refers alternately to the work of great painters and works of sculpture as exemplars of significant form and the fourth dimension. Physicality comes to the fore; Weber's fourth dimension was "dependent for its existence upon the three material dimensions."[177] In a sense Weber also conflates painting and sculpture, trying to bring the obdurate materiality, or plasticity, of three-dimensional sculpture into the two-dimensional realm of painting. In making this direct type of analogy Weber may have been inspired by Matisse, who had theorized that "a drawing is a sculpture;" citing each type of work as the embodiment of "expressive gesture."[178] In this context Weber might also be thinking back to the work of Auguste Rodin, particularly his drawings. Weber had visited Rodin's studio several times while he was in Paris, and a series of Rodin's drawings had been shown at '291' in April of 1910, just after the "Younger American Painters" exhibition, which was Weber's first show with Stieglitz.

It is hard to imagine that Weber would have missed this show, as he was by this time a habitué of '291' and living in rooms adjacent to the gallery space on Park Avenue.

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[176] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 550.
[177] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[178] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 550.

Seeing the impressions of the sculptor captured in a two-dimensional medium would surely have been enlightening for him. A number of critics were particularly sensitive to Rodin's powerfully executed sketches. J. Nilsen Laurvik wrote in the *New York Times*, "There is a force elemental and appalling in these simple outlines, that has never before been presented in art. Life has been surprised and stands shivering, breathless and all absorbed in its passionate, flesh-crushing embrace."[179] Throughout his review, Laurvik's language is rich with this type of experiential terminology that is apparent in Weber's writing. Rodin was the great modeler: he reveled in the materiality clay and developed a style of drawing that similarly celebrated his fascination with tactility and movement through his manipulations of the human form. Laurvik wrote that Rodin's drawings are "the quintessence of brevity, the essence of art expression that has here been flashed in a piece of paper."[180] Another reviewer explained that each drawing by Rodin "contained a note understood by the sculptor," emphasizing the fact that these drawings are the result of observation, a product of the act of perceiving something in the world.[181] Both these writers pick up on the experiential value of Rodin's graphic work, something that Weber also appreciated about Rodin.

Weber would later refer to Rodin's drawings as "one of the pillars of modern art," observing in them that "fiery impression, that plastic power" that represented an ideal instance of plastic expression and a palpable example of three-dimensional principles

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[179] J. Nilsen Laurvik, "Review of Rodin at the Photo-Secession Galleries," reproduced in Jonathan Green, ed. *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Aperture, 1973), 144.
[180] Laurvik, "Review of Rodin at the Photo-Secession Galleries," 144.
[181] Charles DeKay, "Review of Rodin at the Photo-Secession Galleries," reproduced in *Camera Work: A Critical Anthology*, 145.

applied to a two-dimensional medium.[182] Beyond his memories of the "Matisse Class" and Rodin, Weber would have had Burgess's "Wild Men," which contained statements by André Derain, Georges Braque, and Picasso, to stimulate his thinking on this analogy between painting and sculpture. Burgess's writing is tinged with humor and exaggeration, but his recorded interviews still betray these artists' profound interest in formal values and perception. Burgess recalled of Matisse, "He chats thoughtfully of the 'harmony of volume' and 'architectural values,'" while Braque had declared to Burgess, "Beauty appears to me in terms of volume, mass, [and] weight."[183] Derain explained that he attempted to "reconstruct" his models to bring forth the unique beauty he perceived in them "in terms of line or volume."[184] For Derain, there was "physic [sic] appeal" in the forms of his models that resulted in a "subjective impression;" it was that impression that he sought to capture on his canvases.

Weber's assertion that "even thought is matter," mentioned in the epigraph, is worth returning to in this context where form is linked both to subjectivity and physical sensation. As noted in chapter one, Matisse held that painting is primarily expressive, not illustrative, and that form guides expression. For Matisse, the thought to be expressed is one and the same as the means of expression: "the thought is worth no more than its expression by the means."[185] Reinterpreting Weber's statement that "even thought is matter" in light of this statement by Matisse, one might see it as Weber's own argument

[182] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 57.
[183] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 33.
[184] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 33.
[185] Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," 35-6.

for the unity of the painter's physical means of expression with the thought or idea that the painter wishes to express through his composition. In other words, each individual stroke upon the canvas is the material equivalent of each of the many sensations that pass through the painter's consciousness and physical body as he paints. Weber wrote poetically,

> The ideal or visionary is impossible without form; even angels come down to earth. By walking upon earth and looking up to heaven, and in no other way, can there be equilibrium. The greatest dream or vision is that which is regiven plastically through observation of things in nature.[186]

Weber seems fixated on bringing something of a sculptural ideal to his painting, as the thinking went that sculpture itself presented a more intimately tactile experience than predominant modes of painting. It was not only the process of sculpture that appealed to these painters — that is, its inherent reliance on the manipulation of forms with the hands — but also the assertive presence of the finished sculpture itself. A sculpture encompassed not only texture that appealed to the eye and the hand, but it is also an independent object, existing in its own space, that can be interacted with in all three of the "known dimensions," as Weber termed them. The paintings of Cézanne, El Greco, Giotto, the drawings of Rodin, and recent work by Picasso, and Braque presented Weber with some sense of how he might bring the experiential values of sculpture into the two-dimensional space of painting.

The example that Weber and his contemporaries found in Matisse, Rodin, Cézanne, Picasso, Braque, and the various types of world-art that they studied gave

[186] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 31.

currency to their spatial and tactile preoccupations in painting, essentially adding a modern precedent to that found in ancient sources and the so-called "primitive" arts of non-Western cultures. This section has explored the formal arguments made Weber and his contemporaries to support their interests in appropriating principles of sculpture, particularly its obdurate existence the "three material dimensions," to painting to create work that possessed "rare quality" to enable reception of the fourth dimension.

"SCULPTURESQUE VALUES" AND AFRICAN SCULPTURE

African sculpture proved to be a crucial visual source for Matisse, Weber, and others interested in developing new formal languages that were in keeping with their commitment to plasticity and tactility. As art historians have noted, Matisse took a primarily "analytic-constructive" approach to his study and subsequent appropriation of African sculptural motifs into his work.[187] Matisse's later recollections of his first encounter with African sculpture at a curio shop in Paris support Flam's assertion as the painter emphasizes their material and formal aspects:

> There was a whole corner of little wooden statues, of Negro origin. I was astonished to see how they were conceived from the point of view of sculptural language.; how it was close to the Egyptians. That is to say that compared to European sculpture, which always took its point of departure from musculature and started from the description of the object, these Negro statues were made in terms of their material, according to invented planes and proportions.[188]

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[187]Flam and Duetch, "Introduction," in *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art*, 4.

[188] "Henri Matisse: First Encounter with African Art 1906" in Flam and Duetch, *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: A Documentary History*, 31. Excerpt from nine interviews with Matisse, conducted by Pierre Courthion in 1941. Archives of the History of Art, Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities, Los Angeles, 54.

Matisse's comparison between the generative processes of a sculpture made in the European tradition versus his imagining of the same process in the African tradition reveals his own fidelity to plastic expression. African sculptures are made "in terms of their own material, according to invented planes and proportions," suggesting the same sort of intuitive process of creation which the receptive European artist would use to create his "condensation of sensations."[189]

Jack Flam has argued that one of the primary reasons European artists were attracted to African sculpture in the early twentieth century was because it provided an immediate example of how to circumvent the foundations of academic art such as the study of anatomy, Renaissance perspective, and chiaroscuro.[190] The sculptures and masks that captured the attention of Weber, Matisse, Picasso, and others appeared to them to embody a new economy of means, one that was unencumbered by cultural and artistic history and also any sense of narrative. In Flam's view, tribal sculpture artists saw a new "idea of man" that was "represented in a sculptural language that often reinvents the anatomical structure of the human body rather than imitating it."[191] This deeply flawed conception of African art as lacking cultural and artistic history was further codified by the growth of large national ethnological museums in Europe and the U.S. and the large colonial expositions held in European capitals.

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[189] This phrase is drawn from "Notes of a Painter," see Chapter 1, 10 n. 23.
[190] Jack Flam, "The Spell of the Primitive: In Africa and Oceania Artists Found a New Vocabulary," *The Connoisseur* 214 (1984), 126.
[191] Flam, "Spell of the Primitive," 126.

Part of the primary appeal of these expositions for Europeans was that they represented what was purported to be the contemporary life of "primitive" peoples, in such a way as to emphasize the "backwardness" of these groups. The primary way that "backwardness" was illustrated was through displays of material culture, and the underlying conceit was that viewers were meant to compare wooden farm tools, hand woven baskets, and other such goods to objects of European manufacture and conclude their own superiority based on the "modernity" of their own material culture.[192] The fantasy of the "primitive" in fact hinged on this type of comparison, which required continual reiteration and reinforcement. A key tenet of the wider cultural mania with primitivism was that "primitive" peoples lived in the modern age, but were somehow outside of modernity's purview. As anthropologists Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas explained, "Above all the cultural primitivist's model of human excellence and happiness is sought *in the present, in the mode of life existing primitive or 'savage' peoples"* (italics mine).[193]

Thus, in place of the history, tradition, and conventions that Europeans ascribed to themselves and their art, "primitive" people and objects were allowed to exist only in the present as immediate expressions of physical and emotional sensation. An episode in Sarah Stein's notes in which Matisse instructs his students in the nuances of studying the figure using an African model lays bare these jarring attitudes, "You may consider this

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[192] Rushing, "Native American Art and Culture and the New York Avant-garde," 81-82.
[193] Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1935), 1. Reproduced in Rushing, "Native American Art and Culture and the New York Avant-garde," 18-19. See also Antliff and Leighten, "Primitive," 181.

Negro model as a cathedral, built up of parts which form a solid, noble, towering construction—and as a lobster, because of the shell-like, tense muscular parts which fit accurately and so evidently into their joints …"[194] During a figure drawing session it would have been acceptable for Matisse to discuss the body in terms of the "mechanics of construction," yet in this case Matisse and his students are engaging in the same type of quasi-scientific observation that entertained audiences at the colonial expositions. He exploits the African man's otherness to characterize him as a "solid, noble, towering construction" on one hand and a "lobster" on the other. Descriptors such as "shell-like" and "tense" emphasize a perceived sense of brute physicality. The racism and ethnocentrism of these statements is clear to the scholar of today, but at the time such thinking was in concert with evolutionary and anthropological theory. Matisse was conflating the real African man with a generalized understanding of African sculpture, emphasizing elements of construction and proportion that set man and object outside of (and implicitly below) the standards of European aesthetics.

The presence of an African person in the studio as a model would have likely had a powerful impact on Matisse's students, reminding them again that the "primitive" was alive and well in the twentieth century. Weber makes no mention of this particular episode in his memories of the "Matisse Class," but he did recall Matisse instructing the students from his "small but very choice" collection of African sculpture,

> He would take a figurine in his hands, and point out to us the authentic and instinctive sculpturesque qualities, such as the marvelous workmanship, the

[194] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 550.

> unique sense of proportion, the supple palpitating fullness of form and equilibrium in them.[195]

In this case students are not being instructed from a live model, but there is a marked emphasis on physical experience here, seen through Weber's use of descriptors such as "authentic," "instinctive," and especially the phrase "palpitating fullness of form." Generally, the pieces of African sculpture that European artists encountered were small scale, single-figure works that they felt invited, even necessitated, hands-on engagement. Picasso was apparently deeply affected by handling an African sculpture owned by Matisse during a dinner at Gertrude Stein's apartment in 1906, and Sarah Stein took note of Matisse's admonition to his students that "a good piece of sculpture must invite us to handle it as an object; just so the sculptor must feel, in making it, the particular demands of volume and mass."[196] For Matisse, as for Weber, the primary stimulant for the imagination was plasticity and tactility, or "sculpturesque" forms that arouse multiple senses. In "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" Weber's ideal of plastic form "arouses the imagination and stirs emotion," it engages and equals the strength of the "perceptive and imaginative faculties of the creator, architect, sculptor, or painter."[197]

"NIGHTMARES" AND FETISHES

Thus far discussion has centered around the formal arguments that Weber and his contemporaries drew from their study of African tribal sculpture in the context of their

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[195] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 74-75.

[196] Suzanne Preston Blier shared this anecdote about Picasso in a lecture entitled "Picasso's *Demoiselles:* Africa, Sex, Evolution, and identity" given at The University of Texas at Austin on March 5th, 2015. For the Matisse quotation, see Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 551.

[197] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

wider interests in plasticity and tactility. The forms of tribal sculpture presented a number of exciting opportunities that these artists were eager to capitalize on, as evidenced by the texts, artist statements, and works of art analyzed above. However these formal "affinities," as they have been called, do not stand on their own. Artists' reception of African art was deeply conditioned by the cultural framework of "the primitive" which had been in place in European society for hundreds of years.

Frances Connelly has argued that the tropes of fetishism and idolatry played a key role in shaping European reception of African art, which was predicated on these two tropes.[198] Here the "primitive" is no longer the ingenious child of nature—the "noble savage"—he is now the "wild man," a slave to the "violent passions and dark superstitions" that were believed to dominate the "primitive" experience, particularly in Africa.[199] Europeans' ethnocentric theories of evolution placed African peoples at the lowest rung of cognitive and social development, and Africa was still known in the popular imagination as the "Dark Continent;" a land dominated by primeval spirits, witchcraft, and the violence of human sacrifice.[200]

Weber mentioned neither "wild men" nor fetishes in "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic point of View," but he does single out "Archaic, and the best of Assyrian, Egyptian, or Greek sculpture" as possessing the "rare quality" of the impression of the fourth dimension.[201] He further pointed out that "[a] Tanagra, Egyptian, or Congo

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[198] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 80-82.
[199] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 81.
[200] Jack Flam and Miriam Duetch, "Discovery: 1905-1918," in *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art,* 25.
[201] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

statuette often gives the impression of a colossal stature" and went on to explain that these types of objects possess "a boundless sense of space or grandeur." Here Weber's language is worth exploring because the tone of his references to African sculpture and to the process of creation in general bear similarities to the concept of the fetish as a bearer of spirit, a power object. Playing on the aesthetic and mystical implications of the fetish, Weber could make his case for the existence of a fourth dimension that could be accessed through the sensory impressions of certain objects all the more compelling.

Scholar William Pietz has argued that the concept of the fetish or idol become essential to modernism, and it is important to consider two characteristics that he identifies as crucial to the concept's operation in European aesthetic thought.[202] The first is the fetish's "irreducible materiality;" that is the object's status as the material embodiment of actual power that resulted from "the correct ritual combination of materials."[203] The next characteristic relates to the themes of singularity and repetition: "the fetish has an ordering power derived from its status as the fixation of inscription of a unique originating event that has brought together previously heterogeneous elements."[204] These heterogeneous elements of the fetish are not limited to its constituent physical parts, but also include "desires and beliefs and narrative structures" that are appropriated by the fetish to "repeat its originating act of forging an identity of articulated relations

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[202] Pietz wrote two important articles detailing the development of the idea of the fetish in European thought. See William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I" *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring, 1985), 5-17 and Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (Spring, 1987), 23-45.
[203] Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 7.
[204] Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 7-8.

between certain otherwise heterogeneous things."[205] In this view, what made the idea of the fetish "fundamental" to modernism was the fetish-object's status as the embodiment of the "idea of an enduring effect of aesthetic unity produced by the singular chance encounter of heterogeneous elements."

Tribal sculptures were also talked about in terms of their relation to idolatry within European discourses. Pietz ascribes similar characteristics to the idol as those he gave to the fetish, with the key distinction that "the idol's truth lies in its relation of iconic resemblance to some immaterial model or entity."[206] In this way, the idol violated the Judeo-Christian censure of graven images and, as Frances Connelly has written, objects identified as idols and fetishes became associated with "false nature" and the darkest aspects of human nature such as base carnality and unbridled sexuality.[207] It was believed that the experience of the "primitive" was ruled by his physical experience of the world and that he was not able to synthesize sensations in the way that the cultivated Western artist could; thus his attempts to represent his experience in visual means would "inevitably result in chaos."[208] "Chaos" was signified by the perceived deformities of the human figure that Europeans located in the forms of African sculpture. This work stood in flagrant violation of the European classical tradition, which had placed the human body as the wellspring of rationality and beauty, the very source of harmony and proportion. So too, the association of idols and fetishes with the supernatural flew in the

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[205] Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 7-8.
[206] Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 7.
[207] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 81-82.
[208] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 89.

face of the modern rationalist rejection of religious dogma and superstition. Thus, African sculpture gained a specific reputation as embodying the monstrous and horrific, one that influenced artists and critics alike.

Edward Carpenter may have served as the conduit between Weber and this particularly pejorative discourse on fetishism and idol worship in the years around 1910. Linda Henderson has already demonstrated that the matter-oriented conception of the fourth dimension that dominates Weber's essay is likely indebted to Carpenter's 1906 treatise on monism, *The Art of Creation*.[209] In the book, Carpenter operates under the premise that man's purpose is to create, to give form to the immaterial, through a "continual movement outwards . . . from the vague to the definite; from the emotional to the practical, from the world of dreams to the world of actual things and what we call reality."[210] Carpenter also wrote about fetishes and idols, intent on explaining their generative processes and contextualizing them as further evidence of man's will to form. For Carpenter the power of the fetish object rested in its ability to embody what he called the "race-life" of a people, that is, a "more extended order of consciousness" that brings the individual into communion with the shared hopes, fears, and memories of his people, both past and present.[211] The fetish is an example of a case in which "an image, by virtue

[209] See 30, n. 45 and 31, n. 47 for full citations of Henderson's two principle writings arguing for Weber's interest in Carpenter's philosophy.
[210] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 14.
[211] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 138.

of association or memory, excites in the mind of the individual beholder a state of consciousness belonging to another order than that of his ordinary life."[212]

Carpenter asserted that fetishism persists in peoples at the lowest level of his scale of conscious development, namely "the primitive" or the child, who lack essential self-awareness and the ability to rationally process the sensorial data of experience. He further explained that the outward form of the fetish and idol "represents a real power there present and acting within the [maker]," in whose mind the "outer object" and "Ideal Memory" (consciousness of the race-life), become entangled and the "splendors of the ideal are showered upon and invest the object."[213] Carpenter sees fear as the primary motivator in the creation of fetishes, classifying it as "one of the most primitive, powerful, and widespread of the emotions."[214] He further explains, "[I]t can easily be understand how prolific a source [fear] has been of deities, good and bad; and how among primitive races certain images invested with an agelong [sic] glamour of ancestral terror become transformed at last into gods or devils."[215] Thus, Carpenter allows for the possibility that not all fetish-type objects may be manifestations of ills and evils. However he reserved the name of "fetish" or "devil" for objects with darker connotations, while "gods" are the embodiment of more noble ideals and virtues.

In fact, Carpenter devotes two entire chapters of his book to discussions of "gods" and their positive connections to race-life. Yet, in the chapter "The Devils and The

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[212] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 185.
[213] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 151.
[214] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 181.
[215] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 182.

Idols," where he makes the connection between primal fear and the fashioning of fetish objects discussed above, Carpenter makes some powerful assertions. Fear lives first in the mind and in memory, and then in the object: "[I]t does not matter whether it is the most innocent and harmless object, or the most really dangerous, as long as it is *thought* to be terrible, as along as the transformation of the race-memory invests it."[216] This statement can be likened to Pietz's observation of the "ordering power" of the fetish, that is, its ability to awaken in the viewer the ritual process that brought it into being and the "desires, beliefs and narrative structures" that underlie its making and continued use. So, too, Carpenter's insistence on the object or fetish as the direct materialization of thought aligns with Pietz's identification of the "irreducible materiality" of the fetish. Carpenter's pejorative analysis of "the primitive's" level of conscious development is also in keeping with the patterns that Connelly has outlined, as Carpenter emphasizes "the primitive" experience as being ruled by superstitions and irrationality.

Another contemporary source that may well have affected Weber's thinking on African sculpture was Gelett Burgess's "The Wild Men of Paris." This text is replete with references to idols and fetishes, and would have been a potent reminder to Weber of the popular reception of African sculpture in America. Much of Burgess's commentary and the artists' statements that he included were focused on discussions of form, and especially the jarring distortions of the human figure and disruptions of figure-ground relationships that characterized much of the "grim and obscene" work that he saw. Picasso drew the most attention in this regard, as Burgess wrote of "[that] little madcap

[216] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 182.

Picasso . . . [who] contrives a huge nude woman, composed entirely of triangles, and presents it as a triumph." A photograph of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* was included in "The Wild Men" and comments like this suggest that the *Demoiselles* may have been at the fore of Burgess's mind while he wrote (fig. 26). Picasso's violent disruptions of traditional figure-ground relationships were shocking to American eyes, as was his embrace of the tribal arts of Africa and those of the ancient cultures of the Iberian Peninsula. Burgess recognized these sources, referring again to Picasso's daring approach to the figure: "So we gaze at his pyramidal women, his sub-African caricatures, figures with eyes askew, with contorted legs, and—things unmentionably worse, and patch together whatever idea we may have . . . ."[217] Burgess clearly felt a deep unease with Picasso's work, a feeling that he wondered if the artist might share as he wrote: "I doubt if Picasso ever finishes his paintings. The nightmares too barbarous to last . . . ."[218]

Burgess grappled with the new "ugliness" that he located in modern painting and immediately associated it with interest in "primitive" sculpture, reasoning that since time immemorial man had "carved grim and obscene things." Burgess exposes his own interest in decoding modern painters' interests in "primitive sculptures," citing a wide range of experience with such art that does not dispel its *grotesquerie* but does speak to the power of its formal language:

> I had studied the gargoyles of Oxford and Notre Dame, I had mused over the art of the Niger and Dahomey, I had gazed at Hindu monstrosities, Aztec mysteries and many other primitive grotesques; and it had come over me that there was a rationale of ugliness as there was a rationale of beauty; that, perhaps, one was but

[217] Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," 34.
[218] Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," 34.

> the negative of the other, an image reversed, which might have its own value and esoteric meaning.[219]

Here Burgess is cognizant that there could be a meaning behind this new "ugliness," but he seems to feel that it is beyond his grasp. There is an air of uncertainty here that echoes Burgess's the uneasy tone of his response to Picasso's figure painting, which the critic had immediately associated with African sculpture. Looking at the *Demoiselles*, which Burgess had photographed to accompany his article, Frances Connelly has argued that Picasso was indeed capitalizing on these popular associations between the grotesque and horrific and the art of Africa.[220]

In *Les Demoiselles* the viewer is presented with a complex and disorienting space where the aggressive rendering of the figures distracts from the spatial architecture of the composition (fig. 26). The mask-like faces, contorted poses, and eyes that stare out to confront the viewer have been interpreted by Connelly as Picasso's incorporation of the "most horrific qualities of the monstrous grotesque."[221] A key aspect of Picasso's appropriation of the forms of African statuary is his emphasis on these violent distortions of the human figure, which coded as distinctly inhuman and horrific to critics like Burgess. One cannot help in this context to think back to Burgess' comment about Picasso's inspirations being "nightmares too barbarous to last." Picasso recalled that *Demoiselles* was inspired by his discovery of African art at the Palais du Trocadero in 1906-1907: "*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have come to me that day, but not at all

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[219] Burgess, "The Wild Men of Paris," 28.
[220] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 79-110.
[221] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 107.

because of the forms: but because it was my first canvas of exorcism—yes, absolutely!"[222] Here Picasso stresses the absolute power of expression he sensed in African masks; he was not thinking merely in terms of form, but also in terms of deep and profound feeling.

Elsewhere in his discussion of the objects that he saw at the Trocadero, Picasso referred to the sculptures as "magical things," and as fetishes. He explained, "The Negroes' sculptures were intercessors … against everything, against unknown, threatening spirits…But all fetishes were used for the same thing. They were weapons. To help people stop being dominated by spirits, to become independent."[223] Here Picasso finds an analog between the fetish and what he believes is the function of works of art, that is, to expose the deep inner workings of the artist's mind and his experience of the world. Picasso further commented, "If we give form to spirits, we become independent of them. The spirits, the unconscious (which wasn't yet much talked about then), emotion, it's all the same thing."[224] Picasso was certainly engaged in the evolving discourses on plastic form and expression, and Burgess remarked upon his interests in this area, writing, "Picasso, too, speaks of values and volumes, of the subjective and of the sentiment of emotion and instinct."[225] Looking back to Picasso's comments on African sculpture, one can see that he made connection between ideas of plastic expression and the fetish. Connelly has asserted that part of the popular fascination with the "wild men" rested in

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[222] "Pablo Picasso: Discovery of African Art 1907-1907" in Flam and Duetch, *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art*, 33. Flam and Duetch reproduce the transcript of an interview between Picasso and André Malreaux, originally printed in Malreaux, *Le Tête d'obsidienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 17-19.
[223] "Pablo Picasso: Discovery of African Art," 33.
[224] "Pablo Picasso: Discovery of African Art," 33.
[225] Burgess, "The Wild Men," 33.

the fact that his experience was seen to be a constant struggle between base physical urges and his unfettered imagination. This struggle had the potential to bring the most grotesque and primeval monsters into being through the "primitive" person's carving and sculpting.[226]

Weber was also devoted to the concept of plastic expression, believing as did Picasso and Matisse, that the process was predicated on a transfer of essences between the maker and matter.[227] The same essential act occurs in the making of the fetish, when the maker is overtaken by the urge to give form to a thought or feeling, and the object he makes becomes a direct materialization of that motivating thought or feeling. Weber's emphasis on the force and "intensity" of impressions received from nature and the "boundless sense of space or grandeur" of a "Tanagra, Egyptian, or Congo statuette" suggests that he may have seen these similarities between fetish-making and plastic expression himself. In the final paragraph of "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" Weber actually proposed a correlation between the strength of the impression that the artist received from the subject and the visual impression that the viewer finds in the work, writing, "[T]he stronger or more forceful the form the more intense is the dream or vision. Only real dreams are built upon. Even thought is matter. It is all matter of things, real things or earth or matter."[228] This type of language suggests that Weber was engaged with the contemporary notion of the fetish, which was predicated on one

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[226] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason*, 19.
[227] See Chapter 1, 38-47 and in chapter 2, 63-66.
[228] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

hand on its materiality, and on the other, its ability to draw the viewer to a higher level of consciousness, which Weber associated with the fourth dimension.

WEBER'S "REAL DREAMS"

What remains to be explained about Weber's interest in the fetish in "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" is his circumventing of the grotesque and of fear, traits which featured prominently in Carpenter's theorizing and dominated Burgess' criticism of modern artists' interest in tribal sculpture. There is an implicit element of awe in Weber's conception of the fourth dimension, evidenced in his defining of it as "the consciousness of a great and overwhelming sense of space-magnitude in all directions at one time." A similar view underlies his statement, "A form in all its extremity still continues reaching out into space if it is imbued with intensity and energy." This is true as well in his continual references to the "ideal:"

> The ideal is thus embodied in, and revealed through, the real. Matter is the beginning of existence: and life or being creates or causes the ideal … The ideal or visionary is impossible without form; even angels come down to earth. By walking upon earth and looking up at the heavens, and in no other way, can there be equilibrium. The greatest dream or vision is that which is *regiven* plastically through observation of things in nature. "Pour les progrès à réaliser il n'y a que la nature, et l'œil s'éduque à son contact."[229]

Carpenter's philosophy looms large here through Weber's insistence on the unity between the "ideal" and "form," which relates back to Carpenter's characterization of works of art as "the embodiment and materialization of the Thoughts of Men."[230]

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[229] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[230] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 25.

The above excerpt is perhaps the most obvious example of the sense of awe or wonder that Weber associated with the fourth dimension; the references to angels "walking upon earth and looking up to the heavens" add a definite air of mysticism and spirituality. This language is highly reminiscent of Carpenter's discussion of so-called "gods" in *The Art of Creation*, which was mentioned above. The essences of "gods" are the universal virtues and strengths of humankind, "Wisdom and Justice and Beauty and Courage and Mother-love, and so-forth," which vary in their material forms among the "races."[231] Carpenter further explains that "gods" arise from contact with the great "World-Self" and "contact with Nature," noting that each race is first "moulded from within by the formative ideas" and then "becomes conscious of these creative powers as the Gods."[232] Carpenter noted a crucial similarity between material "gods" and the "devils" or fetishes, explaining that each represents essential and universal "formative ideas" that emanate from "centres of human energy and vitality."[233] So "gods" and "devils" (fetishes) come into being through the same process, each the embodiment of "supernatural awe, or fascinating dread, of the most unreasoning terror" in keeping with the motivating thoughts and feelings behind its creation.[234] In his text, it seems Weber chose to draw on "gods" through his emphasis on the "ideal" and the imagery of the angel, which suggests those positive virtues that Carpenter associated with "gods."

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[231] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 173.
[232] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 172.
[233] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 174.
[234] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 183.

In Carpenter's words the essential quality of the fetish or idol is that it "overwhelms [the beholder] with emotion—with Wonder and Fear and the rude smitings of Conscience—and compels him to bow to a Life, a Presence, which he cannot fathom."[235] Arguably this statement could also be applied to his "gods," since they are built up of the same "formative ideas" as the fetish. Weber might have been echoing these sentiments when he spoke of the "great and overwhelming sense of space-magnitude in all directions at one time" or of the "intensity and energy" of forms "reaching out into space."[236] In fact, a crucial aspect of Weber's fourth dimension is that it "arouses the imagination and stirs emotion," thereby raising consciousness much like Carpenter's "gods" and fetishes. Like Carpenter, Weber also asserts that this higher consciousness is dependent on contact with nature, as evidenced by his inclusion of a quotation by Cézanne—"Pour les progrès à réaliser il n'y a que la nature, et l'œil s'éduque à son contact"—which carries that implication.[237] Weber signaled the reader to his understanding of Cézanne's statement in the preceding sentence, which reads: "[t]he greatest dream or vision is that which is *regiven* plastically through observation of things in nature."

In light of the above discussion about the reception of tribal sculpture and its inextricable connections to ideas of the fetish and idol, or to a more benevolent type of

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[235] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 186.
[236] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[237] This quotation is drawn from a letter that Cézanne wrote to Emile Bernard on July 25th, 1904 that was reproduced along with many others in *Mercure de France* 16 (1907) under the title "Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne." Weber later remembered the time he spent translating these letters just after his New York in 1909. See "The Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 119.

deity, Weber's continued references to dreams and visions in his Fourth Dimension essay take on an interesting shade of meaning. Weber's matter-oriented conception of the fourth dimension as a physical space, one which could be accessed through art that appealed to the senses and especially touch, gave him a sensitivity to the new formal language he observed in objects like his Yaka figurine (fig. 5).[238] His repeated references in the essay to plastic expression, such as his dictum that "the greatest dream or vision is that which is *regiven* plastically through observation of nature,' which have been shown to relate to the mystical process of fetish making, might also suggest his interest in the "primitive" consciousness outlined by Carpenter, in which man's sensorial powers become co-opted by the imagination.

In Carpenter's view, the "primitive" lacked the essential ability to differentiate between objects and subjects, "[t]he knower, the knowledge, and the thing known are in experience undistinguished, darkly confused together . . . ."[239] His model of dream production relies on a similar premise—a collision between object and subject. He explains that the "visions of sleep grow undisturbed" while the "thoughts of our waking hours are constantly *corrected*, and set in order by the actual world around us."[240] Carpenter went so far as to argue that it is possible for dream-images to gain a higher degree of reality than waking thoughts because they "grow undisturbed," feeding off of feelings and sense-impressions, "formative ideas," without the correction from the outer

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[238] See figure 5 for Weber's gouache drawing of the figurine and figure 6, the Sipperell photograph showing Weber contemplating his figurine.
[239] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 38.
[240] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*. 20.

world. In dreams, the individual may "wonder sometimes at the *intense* reality of the things that [they] see." [241]

The fetish-object itself was viewed in European thought as the materialization of the irrationality of the "primitive" consciousness, which itself was often likened to a dreamlike state.[242] Arguably then, one could consider the fetish as a "real dream," to use Weber's term. That is, an object that through its materiality and qualities of form recalls the process of its making and elicits intense physical and emotional responses. Weber's examples of "dreams realized through plastic means," which included "pyramids and temples, the Acropolis and the Palatine structures; cathedrals and decorations," are buildings with well-known spiritual and mystical associations of a sort that would have also applied to the "best of Assyrian, Egyptian, or Greek sculpture." It is plastic expression, where spirit is transferred into matter, giving these "dreams" reality. Thus tribal sculpture, which was most closely associated in the popular mindset with the ideas of fetishism and idolatry—material forms begotten through intense psychological experiences—offered Weber another compelling analogy for the power of experience he wished to confer on the fourth dimension.

The inextricable link that Weber established between dreams and "real experience," that is, the engagement with the physical world through the primary senses points to Carpenter. However, in making these claims Weber also had the theories of William James to draw upon. James linked the continual evolution of thoughts to

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[241] Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, 20.
[242] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason,* 86.

"subjective sensations;" arguing that sensorial data continually altered mental images and created new relations between object and subject.[243] Both Carpenter and James drew on a pre-Freudian notion of the unconscious posited by Frederick W.H. Myers.[244] Myers' theory allowed for the existence of a "subliminal conscious," which he described as "a rubbish heap as well as a treasure house;—degenerations and insanities as well as the beginning of a higher development."[245] This description is similar Carpenter's explanation of the mind's contents during sleep, when thought-images stimulated by the outer world "are more scrappy, more incoherent, more grotesque" because they exist free of the correcting influence of further sensorial data than that which initially generated the image.[246] Without this corrective influence, dream images achieve a high degree of reality, becoming the "real dreams" that Weber wrote about in his fourth dimension essay.

PAINTING THE FOURTH DIMENSION AND DREAMS

Weber's "real dreams" are not the nightmares of Burgess and other critics because he took a more positive approach to fetish-objects through Carpenter's concept of the material "god." In his art, Weber also found various routes to explore the new formal and expressive possibilities presented by African sculpture. This section seeks to chart out some of the ways that Weber's figure paintings of 1910 and 1911 appear to incorporate

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[243] James, "Stream of Thought," vol. 1, *Principles,* 287.

[244] Linda Henderson laid out these connections between the theories of Carpenter, Myers, and James and their implications for artists in "Mysticism and the 'Tie that Binds,'" see 30, n. 45 for full citation of that article.

[245] The quotation from Myers comes from F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death,* 2 vols, (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1903), I, 72. Reproduced in Henderson, "Tie that Binds,'" 33 and 37, n. 67.

[246] Carpenter, *Art of Creation,* 16.

his understandings of these new possibilities, and further, to offer insights into Weber's attraction to African sculpture as a visual metaphor for accessing the fourth dimension.

A key feature of a number of Weber's figure paintings in 1910 is the remarkable bulk of his figures; a quality that echoes his theoretical interest in the "sculpturesque" and architectonic values of African sculpture. In *Two Figures* and *Composition with Three Figures*, both of 1910, the composition is dominated by weighty female nudes (figs. 25, 29). Their massive arms and legs, mask-like faces, and poses that vary between squatting and sitting are highly reminiscent of the types of African sculptures that Weber would have seen in the studios of his Parisian contacts and at the massive ethnological museums there. Tightly cropped compositions in both paintings keep the viewer's attention on the sculptural mass of the bodies, rendered with an economy of line reminiscent of direct carving. These works are foreshadowed by Weber's small gouache drawing *African Statuette,* with its intimate perspective and limited color palette that reveals his taking the lessons of sculpture to heart through a slightly rough brushstroke that emphasizes the perceived roughness and planarity of the carving of his Yaka Figurine (fig. 5). Weber's paint-handling remains similar in *Two Figures* and *Composition with Three Figures,* as he used a type of hatching and stippling that also evoke roughness and woodcarving.

Art historians Linda Henderson and Jill Anderson Kyle have both noted in Weber's works of 1910 and 1911 his faithfulness to Stein's emphasis on Cézannesque plasticity, evidenced in paintings like *Two Figures* and *Composition with Three Figures*

by his reliance on volumetric form to order space and to evoke "tactile sensations."[247] Looking at another painting, Weber's *Surprise* of 1910, one sees Weber's growing preference toward exaggerated contours with crisp sculptural edges (fig. 30). This painting has a more recognizable setting than either *Two Figures* or *Composition Three Figures*, but there is an undeniable emphasis on the mass and weight of the bodies that brings *Surprise* into relation with these two other paintings. Other works such as *Composition with Four Figures*, also of 1910, also display less interest in setting than in massive figures that dominate the pictorial space (figs. 29, 31). In this work and *Composition with Three Figures* it seems especially likely that Weber was looking to works like Picasso's *Three Women* and Braque's *La Femme,* where the painters broke down figure-ground relationships through defining bodies and settings in a similar faceted mode (figs. 27, 28). Jill Kyle noted the marked emphasis in Weber's art on plastic form, explaining that his work was "firmly rooted in a sense of touch, in matter that could be made tangible" and the painter relied on tactility "as a means to involve the viewer and artist in the pictorial design."[248]

Weber's figure paintings from 1910 and 1911 seem to exhibit a fascination with bridging this gap between the genres of painting and sculpture, as he tried to do in his theorizing by creating the painting/sculpture analogy discussed above. So Weber is certainly engaging sculpture here, but he also had the visual precedents set by Picasso, Braque, and Matisse to help guide him in applying these values to painting. Looking first

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[247] Henderson, *Fourth Dimension*, 299; Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 364.
[248] Kyle, "Cézanne and American Painting," 364.

at Weber's *Two Figures* (1910; fig. 25), one sees figures sharply articulated in terms of volumetric forms that certainly echo Picasso's pre-Cubist nudes (figs. 25-27). In fact, Weber would have seen two such nudes reproduced in "The Wild Men": *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the slightly later *Three Women* (figs. 26, 27). Pierre Daix has explained that these two works represent the beginning and ending of the Picasso's proto-Cubism, revealing the artist's gaining control over the "formal power of expression" through a new "spatial architecture."[249] Daix has credited the work of Cézanne as one of Picasso's inspirations for this new fixation on structure, writing that Picasso was now painting in terms of Cézannesque volumes that were not "merely apparent volumes suggested by optical allusions, tricks of light and shade, but measureable, objective volumes."[250] Looking at Braque's sketch *La Femme,* which actually represents three women; with its powerful articulation of forms as weighty masses would have been a potent evocation of this idea for Weber, along with Picasso's *Three Women* (figs. 27, 28).

Weber may have been taking some lessons in formal construction and composition from Picasso, yet he chose to avoid the *grotesquerie* that Picasso toyed with in works such as *Les Demoiselles*. Dow and Matisse's teachings probably played a role here, as did Carpenter's theorizing on material "gods," in guiding Weber towards compositions which stressed harmony, balance, and decorative values. Looking to Weber's painting *Surprise* one can see an attention to sculptural bulk through prominent contour lines and delicate hatching in the manner of Cézanne (fig. 30). However, there is

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[249] Pierre Daix and Jean Rosselet, *Picasso, the Cubist Years 1907-1916: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings and Related Works* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1979) 39.
[250] Daix, *Picasso, the Cubist Years,* 47.

also a poetic quality present in the delicate poise and balancing of the women's gestures and particularly in their faces. Elongated eyes with heavy brows and wide pupils gaze outward toward the viewer, but one does not get the confrontational stare that elicited such a response from Burgess in his writings on Picasso.

Weber's *Two Figures* gives similar prominence to the eyes, this time with bulging foreheads and pronounced noses that suggest a more direct borrowing from African masks (fig. 25). The figures in these paintings, as well as those in *Composition with Four Figures*, all exhibit these large eyes with pupils that appear almost dilated, so that even though some figures are looking straight out toward the viewer, they seem to look past us as if lost in some reverie (fig. 32). All of the figures in *Composition with Three Figures* have their eyes closed, and their gestures which all recall classical states of repose and reverie, make explicit Weber's interest in "real dreams" (fig. 29) Their reality is bolstered by Weber's attention to "sculpturesque" details, such as their bulk and the rigidness of their contours that recalls the rough-hewn quality that was valued so highly in African sculpture.

Weber's *Figure Study* of 1911, which is often compared to Matisse's *Blue Nude* (1907), could also be read as fitting into this category of the "real dream" (figs. 32, 33). To better understand Weber's woman, some discussion of the Matisse picture is necessary. The pose of the figure in the *Blue Nude* has been read as overtly sexual, in that the woman's positioning highlights her ample buttocks and breasts, not unlike the traditional nineteenth-century odalisque (fig. 33). Art historian Gill Perry has argued that this pose, combined with what Perry describes as the figure's powerful gaze toward the

viewer, her sculptural bulk, and the high-keyed colors produced an effect that Perry terms "actuality" in the painting.[251] "Actuality" refers to the visual impact of the painting, which is meant to communicate the strength of the sensations felt by the painter and the dual essences of himself and his subject. Thirty years later Matisse said of his *Blue Nude*, "If I saw such a woman in the street, I should run away in terror. Above all I do not create a woman, I make a picture."[252] Here Matisse clearly elevates formal values over any sense of mimesis, and in his teaching he also explained the centrality of the creative imagination in this process. For Matisse, as for Picasso and Weber, the primary stimulant for the imagination was plasticity. Matisse explained that the "plastic conception" of the model is of the utmost importance, and he further advised his students to follow their individual intuition: "The model must not be made to agree with preconceived theory or affect. It must impress you, awaken in you an emotion, which in turn you seek to express."[253]

Weber's woman differs in several significant ways from his former teacher's (fig. 32). He poses the figure so that she is covering her breasts, and the figure's massive thigh and upturned leg thwart a view of the buttocks. The principal elements of the figure's body such as her bulging abdomen, large thighs, and large feet show that Weber is drawing from tribal sculpture in a more direct way than Matisse. Overall, her form is more bulky than supple, and harder contours predominate over the sensuous arabesques that Matisse was drawn to. Weber had experimented with that language, employing it in

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[251] Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'" 61.
[252] Matisse quote reproduced in Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern,'"61.
[253] Sarah Stein, "Notes on the Matisse Class," 551.

works such as *Summer* from 1909, but as his paintings from 1910 on would illustrate he quickly gravitated away from lithe arabesques towards harder contours (fig. 34). Also present in *Figure Study* is the large, elongated eye that is found in Weber's other works such as *Two Figures* and *Composition with Four Figures* (figs. 25, 31). The woman's eye and her semi-recumbent pose create a dreamlike aura, which is tied back to the physical world through the obdurate contours of her body and the volumetric treatment of the blue drapery on which she lays. Indeed, Weber seems here to be interested in producing an effect analogous to the "actuality" Gill Perry found in *Blue Nude*, and Weber's painting shows he looked both to Matisse and the qualities of African sculpture for a means of expressing that notion visually. In the fourth dimension text Weber's ideal of plastic form "arouses the imagination and stirs emotion," it engages and equals the strength of the "perceptive and imaginative faculties of the creator, architect, sculptor, or painter."[254]

In the final paragraph of "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" Weber proposes a correlation between the strength of the impression that the artist received from the subject and the visual impression that the viewer finds in the work, writing, "[T]he stronger and more forceful the form the more intense the dream or vision." As discussed in this chapter, it is statements like this that have called up associations to the fetish and the idol. The European notion of the fetish is predicated, on one hand, on its materiality, and on the other, its ability to draw the viewer's mind to the act of its making and the underlying beliefs and desires that brought it about. As Weber writes, "the greatest dream or vision is that which is *regiven* plastically through

[254] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

observation of things in nature." Weber uses tribal sculpture here in a way similar to the Chinese dolls discussed in the previous chapter. Both types of objects function for him as an alternative modality for the appreciation of art objects that privileges the engagement of the physical senses and the imagination.

What is different in Weber's use of tribal sculpture in "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" is that he is able to rely on the implications of the fetish and idol to suggest a type of engagement between the viewer and the work of art that is more primeval and more powerful because of these objects' mystical and supernatural associations. Here the "overwhelming sense of space-magnitude" that Weber locates in feeling and perceiving the fourth dimension finds a powerful analog in the "intensity and energy" of a "Tanagra, Egyptian, or Congo statuette" that gives it the sense of "a form at its extremity still reaching into space."[255] The concept of the fetish, which relies on a ritual accord between maker and materials and a transfer of spirit, also complements Weber's interest in Carpenter's monism through its emphasis the mystical union of spirit and matter. Similarly relying on this unity of spirit and matter and the mystical transference of power through the fetish, Weber anchors his conception of the fourth dimension in the "primitive" dream or vision by making analogies to the imagined power of the "primitive" imagination to conjure material apparitions of universal human feelings and emotions.

[255] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.

Chapter 4: *'Primitive' Experiments: the "Crystal Figures"*

In February of 1912 Weber, having broken ties with Stieglitz the year before, mounted a show of his recent work at the Murray Hill Gallery in Manhattan.[256] This exhibition was met with general derision in the press, not unlike the response to his one-man exhibition at '291' the year before. In 1911 it was his experiments with the figure—in works such as *Two Figures* and *Composition with Three Figures*—that drew critics' ire. Arthur Hoeber wrote for the *New York Globe:*

> The more the work is strange, crude, awkward, appalling, evidently the more it is in favor with him. The present display marks the high-water mark of eccentricity.... Here are travesties of the human form, here are forms that have no justifications in nature . . . .[257]

J. Edgar Chamberlain responded with similar disdain for Weber's figures in the 1911 show, "Grotesque profiles, enormous eyes, bodies like jointed dolls . . . these are the elements of Mr. Weber's pictures and they are appalling."[258] The critic for the *Evening World* opined in 1911, "such grotesquerie could only be acquired by a long and perverse practice," arguing that Weber's attempts to find a "naïve, fresh, primitive way of seeing things" had deviated so far that no one could ever believe that he had begun by observing nature.[259]

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[256] Percy North offers a full account of the falling out between Weber and Stieglitz in "Turmoil at 291," *Archives of American Art Journal* 30 (1990), 76-84.
[257] Arthur Hoeber, review of Max Weber at '291', reproduced in *Camera Work* 34 (1911), 31.
[258] J. Edgar Chamberlain, review of Max Weber at '291', reproduced in *Camera Work* 34 (1911), 32.
[259] Henry Tyrrell, review of Max Weber at '291', reproduced in *Camera Work* 34 (1911), 32.

Criticism of Weber's 1912 exhibition carried a similar tone of general disapproval. A critic in *The New York Times* expressed his distaste for Weber's treatment of the human figure in no uncertain terms, writing that the painter's "use of human material" seemed to be "unjustified by any theory constructed by an intelligent thinker."[260] Weber was further accused of "decadent sophistry" and of "perversions of the relations of organic forms in the name of humility and childlike simplicity."[261] R.W. Macbeth writing in *The Christian Science Monitor* was more charitable in his review of Weber's work but still admitted, "The groups of figures, of which there are many, are quite out of the reach of most of us."[262] That said, both critics did find a bright spot in the exhibition—a series of works that Weber had titled his "Crystal Figures." *The New York Times* critic astutely observed in these canvases, such as *Three Witches* and *The Geranium*, that Weber was "experimenting in the groupings of colors and the architectonic arrangement of geometrical forms" and deemed the results to be of "extraordinary beauty."[263] Macbeth struck a similarly laudatory tone in his review, describing this group of paintings as "really remarkable" and locating in them a level of excellence that suggested Weber had "reached his highest mark" to date.[264]

Weber's "Crystal Figures" have long been of interest to scholars, as they are generally thought to be the most fully realized visual representations of Weber's

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[260] "More Post-Impressionism," *New York Times* (February 18, 1912).
[261] "More Post-Impressionism," *New York Times* (February 18, 1912).
[262] R.W. Macbeth, "Weber's Paintings on View in New York Product of 'Cubiest [sic] School," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, February 26, 1912). Partially reproduced in North, "Max Weber: The Early Paintings (1905-1920)," 110. For citation, see 120, n. 24.
[263] "More Post-Impressionism," *New York Times* (February 18, 1912).
[264] Macbeth, "Weber's Paintings."

fascination with plasticity. Consider *The Witches* of 1911, for instance (fig. 35). Truly massive figures dominate the composition, blocking out the possibility of even suggesting a setting. The cool palette of blues and grays amplifies the solidity, or perhaps even hardness, of the figures that is communicated to the eye through the emphasis on jagged contours. A preponderance of lines and interlocking planes recalls Cézanne, as well as recent work by Picasso and Braque such as *Three Women* and *La Femme* (figs. 27, 28). *Three Crystal Figures, The Geranium*, and *Two Brooding Figures* each exhibit this same approach to form, with an emphasis on hard contours and layered planes (figs. 36, 37, 38). Henderson has characterized this approach as "stubbornly volumetric" and linked it directly to the "plastic point of view" that Weber espoused in *Camera Work* that was so indebted to the Parisian milieu of 1908 and especially Leo Stein's theories on plasticity and tactility.[265]

It is worth noting that in the "Crystal Figures" Weber continued to appropriate elements of tribal sculpture, indicating that in 1911-1912 he still saw such forms as a viable visual metaphor for plasticity. Explicit borrowings include elements such as the hunched postures and pronounced thighs of the figures in *Three Witches* and *Three Crystal Figures*, which also featured in his 1910 nudes and in Picasso's African period figure paintings (figs. 35, 36). However, some motifs like the large, heavily lidded eyes of the figures in Weber's 1910 nudes such as *Two Figures* or *Composition with Three Figures* have been replaced with less pronounced ones that are more integrated into the formal rhythms of the figures' faces (figs. 25, 29). Comparing these two earlier works to

[265] Henderson, *Fourth Dimension,* 327.

Three Witches and *Three Crystal Figures*—one observes that Weber is concerned with the same underlying problem—that is, how to organize a composition in terms of mass and volume without losing the harmony that his teachers Dow and Matisse had argued was essential to painting. So again Weber was thinking about the "sculpturesque" values of painting and attempting a very sophisticated blending of the lessons he learned from his study of tribal art and recent French painting. However, in the "Crystal Figures" Weber adopted a faceting technique that is more pronounced than what he had used previously, making any direct references to tribal sculpture less obvious than they were in his 1910 nudes.

Scholars have not focused on the Africanesque elements of Weber's "Crystal Figures," largely because the moniker "Crystal Figures" has been interpreted as a nod toward scientific discourses on the crystalline structure of matter and a shift away from interest in the "primitive." The above discussion of *Three Witches* and *Three Crystal Figures* indicates that Weber's primitivizing tendency was still at work, yet the allusion to scientific discourses should not be discounted. These works, like all of Weber's paintings and theorizing discussed in previous chapters, represent a confluence of many streams of thought. Taking a brief moment to consider the form of the crystal and its various associations as we have considered the doll and the fetish will illuminate what might have drawn Weber to the "search of form in the crystal."[266]

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[266] The phrase "search of form in crystal" is borrowed from a notation that Weber made in the catalog of his 1930 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, compiled by Alfred H. Barr. See a full reproduction of that catalog see *Three American Modernist Painters* (New York: Arno Press for the Museum of Modern Art, 1969), 16, cat. 16.

R.W. Macbeth's review of Weber's 1912 exhibition notes that the title "Crystal Figures" might indeed be derived from crystal-like forms that were represented on the canvas: "There is a series that Mr. Weber calls 'crystal figures,' suggested by the regular crystal formations, that are really remarkable . . . ."[267] It seems quite possible that the critic was paraphrasing Weber here; the artist recalled of *The Geranium* in 1930, "Two crouching figures of women dwelling in a nether or unworldly realm. The conception and treatment spring for a search of form in the crystal. It is a painter's realization of sculpturesque and tactile values."[268] Phrases like "search of form in the crystal" have led scholars such as Percy North to draw a passing connection between Weber's paintings and crystallography. North speculated that the crystal would have represented for Weber "matter reduced to the lowest common denominator."[269]

North's assumption may not be far off the mark, as Weber often stated his dedication to moving beyond appearances to uncover the universal spiritual and material essences of things in the real world, and scientific advances often revealed unseen entities and phenomena. By 1912 there had been a number of articles on crystallography published in scientific publications such as *Nature*, in Britain, and *Scientific American* and *Popular Science* in the United States. Popular publications also showed interest in this topic. *The New York Times* ran two articles on advancements in crystallography in September of 1912, each chronicling the excitement in the scientific community around

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[267] Macbeth, "Weber's Paintings."
[268] Weber's full catalog notation for *The Geranium,* see 94, n. 259.
[269] North, "Max Weber: The Cubist Decade," 23.

the new process of X-ray crystallography.[270] X-Ray crystallography confirmed the existence of the crystal lattice; before this discovery various crystalline arrangements of molecules had been hypothesized but never definitively proven.[271]

The announcement of the discoveries made through X-ray crystallography post-dates Weber's unveiling of the "Crystal Figures" by a few months, but *Harper's Weekly* ran several short items on earlier advances in crystallography between 1910 and 1912 that may have had caught his attention.[272] These articles were most often preoccupied with the growth and genesis of crystals, emphasizing the "marvelous resemblance between crystalline growth and the growth of animals and plants, especially in reference to the power of healing and repairing of injuries."[273] There was some debate at this moment as to whether or not crystals were living matter. Though most scientists tended to agree that they were inorganic, that did not stop comparisons between crystals and living things, especially with regard to the crystal's apparent ability to "heal" itself when growth is interrupted due to damage from outside forces or from invasive molecules altering its chemical makeup.[274] There was also a marked interest in the physical force

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[270] See "Discovery Upsets Chemical Science," *New York Times* (September 13, 1912); and "Chemists Aroused by Tutton's Feat" *New York Times* (September 14, 1912).
[271] For a useful introduction to the history of x-ray crystallography, see Kathleen Lonsdale, *Crystals and X-rays* (New York; Van Nostrand, 1949).
[272] These items listed in chronological order: "Liquid Crystals," *Harper's Weekly* (April 4, 1910), 29; "The Growth of Crystals," *Harper's Weekly* (July 8, 1911), 25; "The Genesis of Crystals," *Harper's Weekly* (February 3, 1912), 21; "The Force of Crystallization," *Harper's Weekly* (April 4, 1912), 23.
[273] "The Growth of Crystals," 25.
[274] The Growth of Crystals," 25.

exerted by growing crystals; researchers confirmed in 1912 that pyrite crystals forming in the crevices of slate rocks could further cleave the rocks apart.[275]

It is possible that Weber way have come into contact with some of these discussions through the time he spent at the Museum of Natural History, which he frequented during these years. In 1911 the Museum's Department of Mineralogy greatly expanded its exhibition space by taking over the hall that had previously housed the Museum's collection of Mexican antiquities.[276] Weber, who testified to spending a great deal of time amongst the Museum's Mexican collections—even dedicating poems to several statues he saw there—may actually have been spurred by this change to consider the crystal form when mineral displays displaced his beloved Mexican sculptures. The appearance of crystals, with their many facets that create a mass of intersecting planes, could have been especially arresting for Weber. Because of its unique formal qualities, Weber may have set up the crystal as a naturally occurring variant of the volumetric, plastic form that he and his contemporaries prized in tribal sculpture and were already appropriating into their art. The reader will remember that Weber referred to *The Geranium* as "a search of form in the crystal" that stands as a direct "realization of sculpturesque and tactile values," thus suggesting that in Weber's thinking the crystal form was an apt metaphor for plastic form in art.[277] So too, the crystal's process of growth and continued expansion could have appealed to Weber, who wrote in his fourth

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[275] "The Force of Crystallization," 23.
[276] American Museum of Natural History, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Trustees of the American Museum of Natural History For the Year 1911* (New York; The Museum, 1911), 40-41.
[277] Phrases in quotations are drawn from Weber's 1930 catalog notation, see 94, n. 259.

dimension essay that a "form at its extremity still continues reaching out into space is it is imbued with intensity and energy."[278]

The crystal also carried mystical associations that might have appealed to Weber, in keeping with his belief that physical objects could be manifestations of spiritual essences or other unseen forces. Various nineteenth-century thinkers including John Ruskin, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Emerson had speculated on the philosophical implications of the crystal form.[279] Emerson had pointed to the faceted patterns of frost on a windowpane as a surrogate to the process of crystallization, and he further argued that the apparent regularity of those patterns was indicative of a universal geometric order that existed everywhere in nature.[280] This perceived sense of regularity in frost crystals compelled Emerson to compare them to plant growth, and he surmised that in both cases "certain resemblances in nature, of unexpected repetitions of form, give keen pleasure when observed . . . ."[281] Schopenhauer was also interested in the phenomena of crystal growth, noting the principal catalyst for such growth as "polarity, or the sundering of a force into two quantitatively different and opposed activities striving after re-union."[282] For Schopenhauer, such forces are essential and universal; he explained that polarity "is a

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[278] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[279] Jonathan Massey discusses the lineage of Ruskin, Schopenhauer, and Emerson's philosophical interest in the crystal in chapter five, "The Language of Ornament," in his book *Crystal and Arabesque: Claude Bragdon, Ornament, and Modern Architecture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).
[280] Massey, *Crystal and Arabesque,* 154.
[281] In 1867 Emerson wrote a short entry in his journal comparing crystallization and plant growth, see it reproduced in William Gilman, ed. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 16, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1960-1982), 186.
[282] Schopenhauer quoted in Massey, *Crystal and Arabesque*, 155.

fundamental type of almost all the phenomena of nature, from the magnet and the crystal to man himself."[283]

The notion of the crystal as a visible manifestation and resolution of unseen, opposing natural forces might have helped draw Weber toward this form. His teachers Matisse and Arthur Wesley Dow had stressed the importance of compositional harmony; he frequently recalled Matisse pointing out the sense of "equilibrium" he found in the compositions of Cézanne and in African sculptures.[284] Crystals may have also shown Weber a viable example of "equilibrium," this time in a naturally occurring three-dimensional from that had already been invested with associations to underlying geometries in nature and the spiritual by past thinkers such as Emerson, whom Weber deeply admired. American architect and Theosophist Claude Fayette Bragdon made several references to crystals in his 1910 book *The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture* that suggest these ideas were in the air at this time.[285] Bragdon, like Emerson and Schopenhauer, had argued that crystals were indeed evidence of the harmonious coming together of the various opposing forces that governed creation.[286] It is not likely that Weber saw this book, since he would not come to know of Bragdon's work until later when Stieglitz introduced him to Bragdon's 1913 book, *A Primer for Higher Space*. However, it seems that between his own predilection toward

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[283] Schopenhauer quoted in Massey, *Crystal and Arabesque*, 155.
[284] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 70-74.
[285] See Bragdon, *The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture* (Rochester, NY: Manas Press, 1910).
[286] Bragdon invokes crystals in this way in three essays in his book, using references crystals in his essays on "Latent Geometry" and "The Arithmetic of Beauty" to support the existence of universal geometries in nature that govern creation and growth. In "The Theosophic View of Architecture," where he uses Schopenhauer's thoughts on polarity in a footnote to underscore the power of dualistic nature of creation.

Emersonian Transcendentalism and the wider cultural interest in crystals augmented by recent scientific discoveries, he may have been pondering crystals from a similar point of view to that of Bragdon.

In a gouache from 1912 entitled *The Emergence of Order Out of Chaos* Weber seems to have been very much preoccupied with finding resolutions amongst opposing forces (fig. 39). The composition may initially read as chaotic, but, as the title implies, a closer study reveals that Weber has created an intricate rhythm of complementary gestures and poses, creating the all-important decorative harmony he sought. These nudes, like those seen in *Three Witches* or *Three Crystal Figures*, are constructed from insistently volumetric forms. This approach to form was appreciated by the *New York Times* critic at Weber's 1912 exhibition, who observed of "Crystal Figure" works that "the clearly defined sculptural edges of the various forms is [sic] calculated to produce the sensation which is given by the severe beauty of a hard material cut into decorative shapes."[287] Weber allegiance to plastic form shines through here, while the evocative title of this work—*The Emergence of Order Out of Chaos*—adds an air of mysticism and grandeur through references to two of the primary opposing forces within the universe, order and chaos.

Scholars such as Kyle and North have commented on the fact that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the "Crystal Figure" works is the way in which Weber blends interests in form with a somewhat poetic impulse. Once again consider Weber's later comments on *The Geranium*; in 1930 he had praised the work for its "sculpturesque

[287] "More Post Impressionism."

and tactile qualities." Yet, Weber also noted its enigmatic subject matter, describing the scene as "two crouching figures of women dwelling in a nether or otherworldly realm." The two women in the painting are indeed locked in crouching postures, and while their exposed limbs and heads recall the sculptural qualities of the other "Crystal Figure" nudes, most of their bodies are covered by bulky robes. Each seems lost in thought, as the figure on the left has her eyes closed and rests her clenched fist against her cheek, while the other figure seems to have just uncrossed her arms as she gazes intently at the small geranium plant in the extreme foreground. There are hints of a dark landscape behind them; a lone tree set up on a hill against the sky. There is also a feeling of absorption here: the figures are perhaps engaging in the type of receptive looking that Weber advocated for in his fourth dimension essay, a type of looking that "arouses the imagination and stirs emotions," bringing one to a higher consciousness.[288] Much later Weber would see in this work "a spiritual and truly poetic mystic beauty," for which he found a "fitting plastic form" where "such a spirit lives."[289] Weber's continual allying of plasticity and poetic mysticism recalls his writings on "real dreams," that are "plastically regiven" by spiritual contact with matter in nature.

Two Brooding Figures, an oil sketch by Weber also from 1911, offers similar content to what one sees in *The Geranium*: two crouching figures, apparently absorbed in their own thoughts, in a dark, ill-defined setting. In this sketch the women dominate the composition much more so than those in *The Geranium*, as their heavy draperies cloak all

[288] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[289] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 501.

but their arms and heads. They exhibit the same poses as the women in the other painting, yet this time both have closed eyes, adding to the dream-like quality of the scene that seems similarly set in an "otherworldly realm." Yet, however fantastical this or the other "Crystal Figures" may seem, for Weber they were always rooted in real experience, in "the three known dimensions."

Weber wrote more on the topic of these real dreams in his *Essays on Art*: "Even a dream, however phantastic [sic], is the child of a real experience. Things with their particularities and attributes of character begin to impress themselves upon our memory through experience, that is, through our senses . . . ."[290] This quotation is drawn out of a chapter in Weber's *Essays*, entitled "The Urge in Art," where Weber made clear that the purpose of the arts is "to give proof—plastic proof of our consciousness" and to answer a "spiritual call" to expression through plastic means.[291] Consciousness of course includes the waves of data processed by the senses, but Weber also made room for the imaginative faculties when he claimed that "even a dream, however phantastic [sic], is the child of a real experience." The form of the crystal, which itself rested at the intersection of the scientific and the mystical, the seen and the unseen, would have made it a compelling metaphor for the type of experience Weber wished his work to communicate. Crystals, like African sculptures or Chinese dolls, could activate the physical senses alongside the emotions and imagination to invigorate and rejuvenate the soul, which was a key concern for Weber.

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[290] Weber, *Essays on Art*, 44-5.
[291] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 41.

Conclusion

Weber left his readers with something of a conundrum at the end of "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists" when he posed the question: "Will there ever be a science to art?" This query strikes something of a strange note, as just a few lines earlier Weber was railing against the work of the "modern painter colorists" for applying paint slavishly according to the "laws of modern chromatics" with little attention to plastic form.[292] The tone here seems disparaging toward the application of scientific principles in art, and Weber took a similar one in "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View." He declared flatly what the fourth dimension is *not*—"a physical entity, or a mathematical hypothesis, nor an optical illusion"—before he explained that his "ideal dimension" is "real, and can be perceived and felt."[293] There is a tension here then, between the "scientific" on one hand, and the aesthetic and mystical on the other.

Taking advantage of hindsight and looking to Weber's slightly later *Essays on Art*—written in 1915—may alleviate some of this tension and help frame Weber's question in "Chinese Dolls." In the *Essays* Weber made his position on the separation between the arts and other scientific and philosophical disciplines clear, stating unequivocally, "[P]hysical science and metaphysics are *not art,* and cannot do for art."[294] Following this declaration Weber took aim at a group he refers to as "prophets and martyrs," who were caught up in the faddish race to be modern and race to represent the

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[292] Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.
[293] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[294] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 15.

advancements of science in their art.[295] These artists, in Weber's mind, "contribute about as much to art, as calling all things by the same name does to intelligence."[296] For Weber, as we have seen, art was about answering a "spiritual call" to give form to universal truths of nature and life. The "prophets and martyrs" miss the mark, just as the "modern painter-colorists" did in "Chinese Dolls," with their neglect of form and authenticity of expression in favor of ostentatious brushwork and high-keyed colors. To Weber art was "spiritual belief or truth, the symbol of the most tender and virile instincts imaginable," and artists co-opting the iconography and language of modern science flew directly in the face of that.[297] An artist adopting the forms of "the mechanical draughtsman's drawing" was just as insincere as the academic's "slavish copying of nature" or the modern colorist's "scientific harmonies, freshly squeezed from the pure tubes."[298]

In short, what Weber was arguing against was any literal attempt by the artist to represent scientific discoveries in his work. Nowhere does Weber deny taking inspiration from advances in the sciences, nor does he take issue with using them as metaphors for aesthetic exploration, which he did in his essay on the fourth dimension and in his "Crystal Figure" paintings. Certain discoveries, like the X-ray and radioactivity, were even referenced by artists as justifications for their more daring formal experiments, because they offered proof that reality extended beyond what could be experienced by the

[295] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 15.
[296] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 15.
[297] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 15.
[298] Weber, *Essays on Art,* 15; Weber, "Chinese Dolls," 51.

naked eye.[299] Here we might find a viable interpretation for Weber's query about whether or not there could ever be "a science to art." As the scientists reveal new truths about the universe through close observation of nature and its phenomena, the artist also reveals universal truth, but in an innately more sincere and personal way, in Weber's view. Both the sciences and the arts are revelatory, but Weber sets the former above the latter because art goes beyond appealing to the intellect to appeal also to the imagination, emotion, and the physical senses. Thus, when Weber asks if "there will ever be a science to art," one might interpret it as a wish to return to an art of substance and truth, to an art that would not rely on the reiteration of facts but on the revelation of new ideas and experiences.

For Weber, form and expression were one in the same. His concept of "plastic expression," derived variously from discourses on formal values in art, psychology, and mysticism, is built on this very principle. Yet, Weber has made abundantly clear through his many writings and artist statements, that he was equally concerned with reception—with activating the imaginative and sensorial faculties of his audience. This may help explain a comment Weber made when looking back on his career. There he described his artistic enterprise as "plastic research" and declared that despite' taking "many liberties" in exploring these principles he "never deviated from humanism."[300] "Humanism," perhaps connotes his fidelity to engaging the mind and body equally in a transcendent and spiritually rejuvenating experience.

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[299] See Henderson, "Reintroduction," in *Fourth Dimension,* 15-27.

[300] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 501.

Weber's fascination with the "primitive" and various types of world art, from Chinese dolls to African tribal sculptures and masks, is also innately linked to this search for truth and authenticity. Both "Chinese Dolls" and "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View" celebrate the authenticity and originality of "primitive" art, using various tropes of childhood, the "noble savage," and both fetishism and idol worship to provide examples of where such sincerity already existed. Children's art and toys, fetishes, and idols were all ensnared in the complex and condescending discourses of primitivism; they were seen as the material proof of the "primitive" consciousness because they exhibited aesthetic traits of ugliness and *grotesquerie* that supposedly developed from a lower order of consciousness ruled by emotion and base physical urges. Edward Carpenter drew a direct parallel between fetishism and children's play: "Fetish-worship is common enough, not only among savage peoples, but among modern nations. One of the most striking instances is that of a child with its doll." He went on to explain that what is "real and important" about both the doll and fetish is that each "overwhelms [the beholder] with emotion—with Wonder and Fear and the rude smitings of Conscience—and compels him to bow to a Life, a Presence, which he cannot fathom."

The fetish or idol and the child's doll, like the crystals discussed in the last chapter, existed somewhere at the boundary between real life and the invisible, the seen and the unseen. These objects were thought by Europeans to be the embodiments of supernatural powers and presences, and of imaginations run wild. Weber, with his deeply held desire to create an art that could engage the physical senses while it also "arouses the imagination and stirs emotion" would no doubt have been drawn to these objects

precisely because of these associations.[301] A central quality of a work of art, as Weber explained later in his life, was that it be "communicative;" communicative of universal truths and values, as well as man's hopes and dreams.[302] The work of art would communicate through its appeals to the senses, through its "sculpturesque and tactile values." African tribal sculptures fulfilled this goal of Weber's by virtue of their cultural associations, and he appropriated freely from them, as did many of his contemporaries. The formal language he saw in these objects, one of intersecting planes and facets, became central to his painting practice, informing his still-lifes, figure paintings, and landscapes. His invocation of African art in his fourth dimension text and this stylistic shift indicate he likely saw primitivized formal language as a way to capture the fourth dimension in art through activating "tactile values."

Some of the "liberties" that Weber recalls taking in his painting in the early years of his career may indeed be his many acts of appropriation of the forms of world art, from African and Ancient Greek sculpture to Native American pottery and Hopi Kachina figurines. In these forms, Weber found not only viable visual metaphors for plasticity but also he was also able to draw on cultural connotations that invested these objects with affective powers as well. This thesis has sought to illustrate how Weber combined these "primitive" metaphors with others drawn from popular science and mysticism, since each of these types of metaphor signified a sense of discovery and the thrill of new experiences. This is how, in "Chinese Dolls," Weber is able to bridge the gap between his

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[301] Weber, "The Fourth Dimension," 25.
[302] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 116.

opening statements that celebrate the humble authenticity of "primitive" objects and his concluding question about bringing "a science to art." Weber's argument in his fourth dimension essay functioned similarly as he allied tribal sculpture and an expansive array of other "primitive" objects with higher dimensional consciousness, drawing on primitivist tropes, perceptual psychology, and mysticism to construct and support his theory.

Looking back on his career in 1958 Weber concluded, "Art comes from social contacts. Impressions constantly seep in, and at times even dazzle you with their brilliance."[303] As each of the subsequent chapters has demonstrated, Weber had no shortage of "impressions" to draw on in years between his return to New York from Paris in 1909 and the Armory Show of 1913. Weber's texts and images of this period have been analyzed from a number of standpoints by scholars wishing to understand Weber's engagement with current aesthetic debates, chart his stylistic development, and understand his role as a conduit of information between Paris and New York. It has been the goal of this thesis to further elucidate Weber's engagement with the discourses of primitivism and the "primitive" to emphasize how these ideas, in concert with other strains of thought such as, popular discussions on scientific and mathematical advancements, and the evolving avant-garde discourse on formal values in art, conditioned Weber's engagement with the various types of world art that he embraced. These same discourses were at play in Weber's reception of the work of modern artists such as Matisse, Picasso, Braque, and Cézanne as well. Weber recalled that early in his

[303] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 117.

career he thrived on "childlike wonderment," taking new experiences in stride and constantly searching for new modes of expression to capture his dynamic view of the world.[304] Primitivism and the "primitive" were deeply embedded in this worldview, and as this thesis has shown that Weber enthusiastically incorporated them into his optimistic vision for what modern art could be and how it could function in the new world of the twentieth century.

[304] "Reminiscences of Weber," Columbia, 35.

Figures

Figure 1: Marionette/Foreign Doll, n.d., Chinese, wood, cloth, clay, metal, wire, pigment. American Museum of Natural History, gift of Berthold Laufer, 1903 (Image: © AMNH 2015).

Figure 2: Doll, n.d., Chinese, cloth, pigment, paper, clay, cord. American Museum of Natural History, gift of Berthold Laufer, 1903 (Image: © AMNH 2015).

Figure 3: Doll (Lady), n.d., Chinese, cloth, pigment, wood, thread, gilt. American Museum of Natural History, gift of Berthold Laufer, 1903 (Image: © AMNH 2015)

Figure 4: Max Weber, *Mexican Statuette,* c. 1910, gouache on paper. The Vilcek Collection, New York (Reproduced in Agee and Kachur, *Masterpieces of American Modernism from the Vilcek Collection,* 105).

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Figure 7: Paul Cézanne, *Five Apples*, c. 1877-78, oil on canvas. Private Collection (Reproduced in Tinterow, "Leo Stein before 1914," 89).

Figure 8: Pablo Picasso, *Still Life*, c. 1908, oil on panel. Collection of Joy S. Weber (Reproduced in Fitzgerald, *Picasso and American Art*, 17).

Figure 9: Henri Rousseau, *The Dream*, c. 1910, oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 10: Rousseau, *Study for the View of Malakoff, Outskirts of Paris*, c. 1908. Collection of Joy S. Weber (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London,* 54).

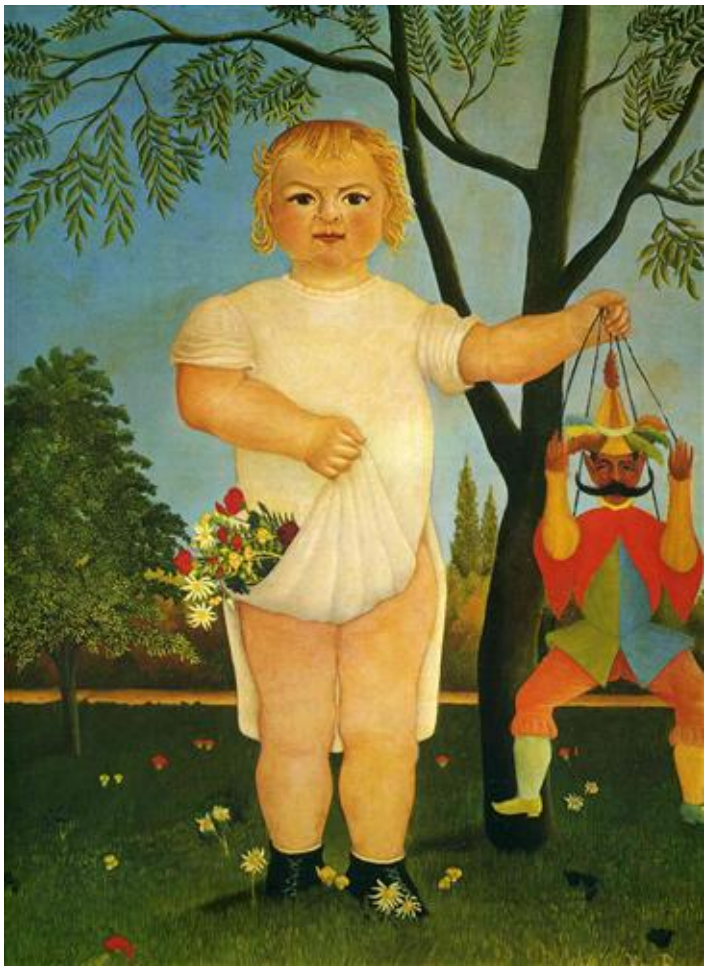

Figure 11: Rousseau, *Child with Puppet*, c. 1903, oil on canvas. Kunsthalle, Winterthur, Switzerland (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 12: Weber, *Landscape I*, c. 1910. University of Reading Art Collection (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London*, 45).

Figure 13: Weber, *Landscape II*, c. 1910. University of Reading Art Collection (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London,* 46).

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Figure 14: Weber, *Landscape III*, c. 1910. University of Reading Art Collection (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London*, 47).

Figure 15: Cézanne, *Large Bathers*, c. 1905, oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 16: Weber, *Still Life with Duck*, c. 1910. University of Reading Art Collection (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London,* 76).

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Figure 18: Hopi *Kachina Doll (Pahlikana)*, late 19th Century, wood and pigment. The Brooklyn Museum, entered collection 1904 (Image courtesy of the Museum).

Figure 19: Hopi *Kachina Doll* (Hahai), late 19th Century, wood and pigment. The Brooklyn Museum, entered collection 1904 (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 20: Cylindrical jar, AD 900-1130, Pueblo (Probably Anasazi), clay, slip, paint. National Museum of the American Indian, New York (Image courtesy of The Museum).

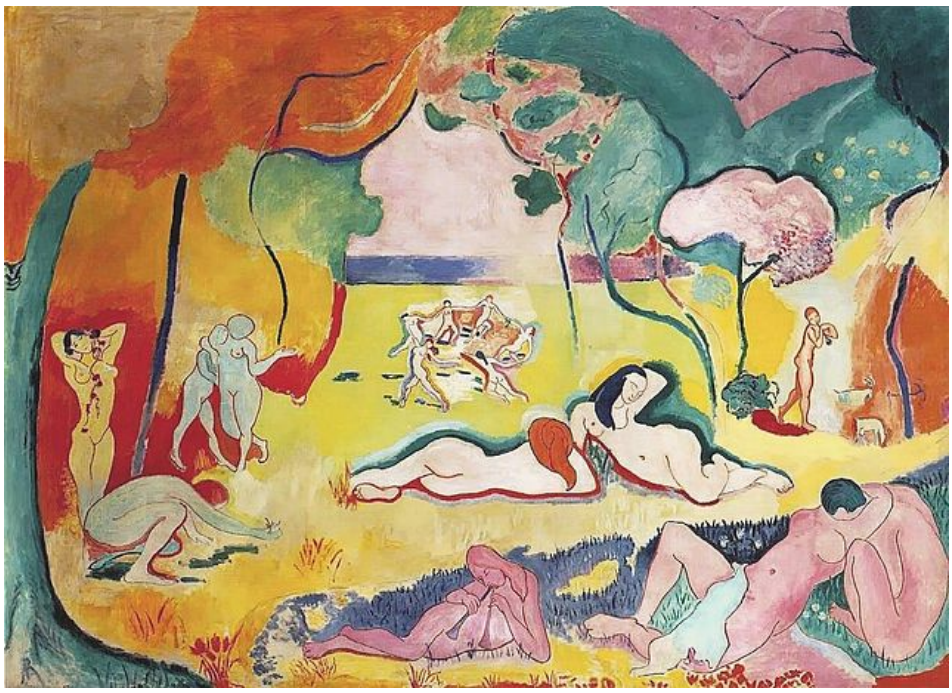

Figure 21: Henri Matisse, *Le Bonheur de Vivre*, c. 1905-6, oil on canvas. The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (Image courtesy of The Barnes Foundation).

Figure 22: Weber, *The Blue Pitcher*, c. 1910. University of Reading Art Collection (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London*, 73).

Figure 23: Weber, *Still Life No. 9*, c. 1912. Private collection. (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London,* 77).

Figure 24: Matisse, *Nature Morte Bleu*, c. 1907, oil on canvas. The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (Image courtesy of The Barnes Foundation).

Figure 25: Weber, *Two Figures*, c. 1910, oil on board. Curtis Galleries, Minneapolis (Reproduced in Fitzgerald, *Picasso and American Art,* 26).

Figure 26: Picasso, *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon,* c. 1907, oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 27: Picasso, *Three Women,* c. 1908, oil on canvas. The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (Reproduced in Fitzgerald, *Picasso and American Art,* 19).

Figure 28: Georges Braque, *La Femme,* c. 1907, ink on paper. Location unknown (Reproduced in Lane, "The Sources of Max Weber's Cubism," 233).

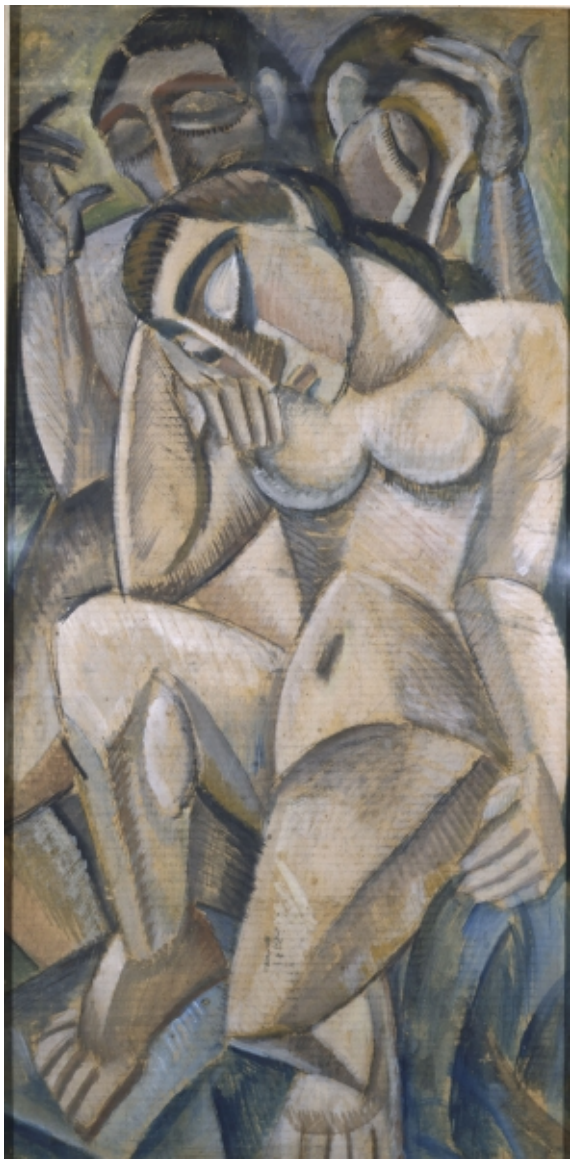

Figure 29: Weber, *Composition with Three Figures,* c. 1910, oil on corrugated board. The Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Reproduced in Fitzgerald, *Picasso and American Art*, 27).

Figure 30: Weber, *Surprise,* c. 1910, gouache on board. The McNay Art Museum, San Antonio (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 31: Weber, *Composition with Four Figures,* c. 1910, charcoal and pastel on paper. The Brooklyn Museum (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 32: Weber, *Figure Study*, c. 1911, oil on canvas. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y. (Reproduced in *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade,* 51).

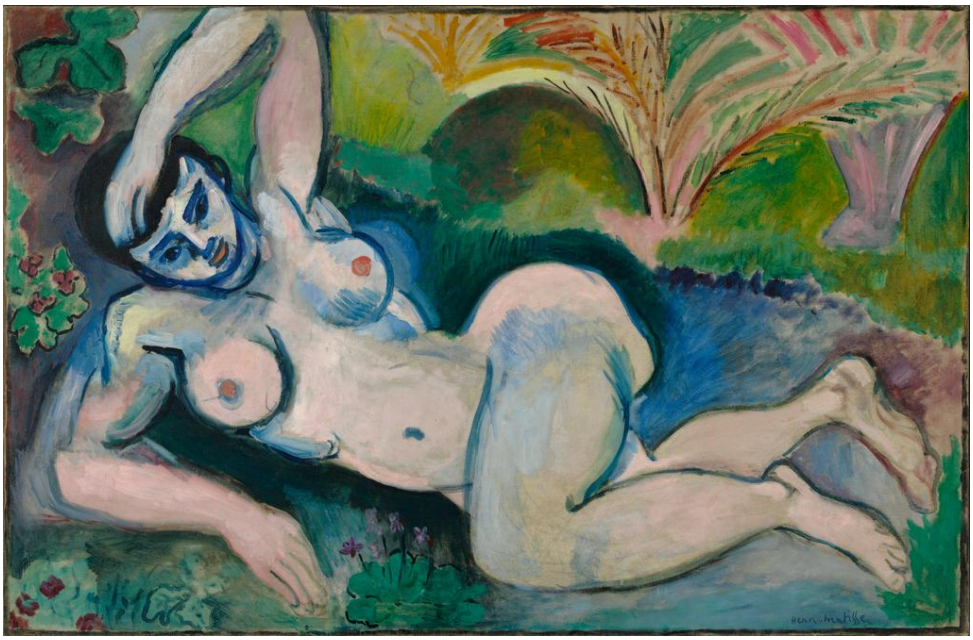

Figure 33: Matisse, *Blue Nude*, c. 1907, oil on canvas. Baltimore Museum of Art (Image courtesy of The Museum).

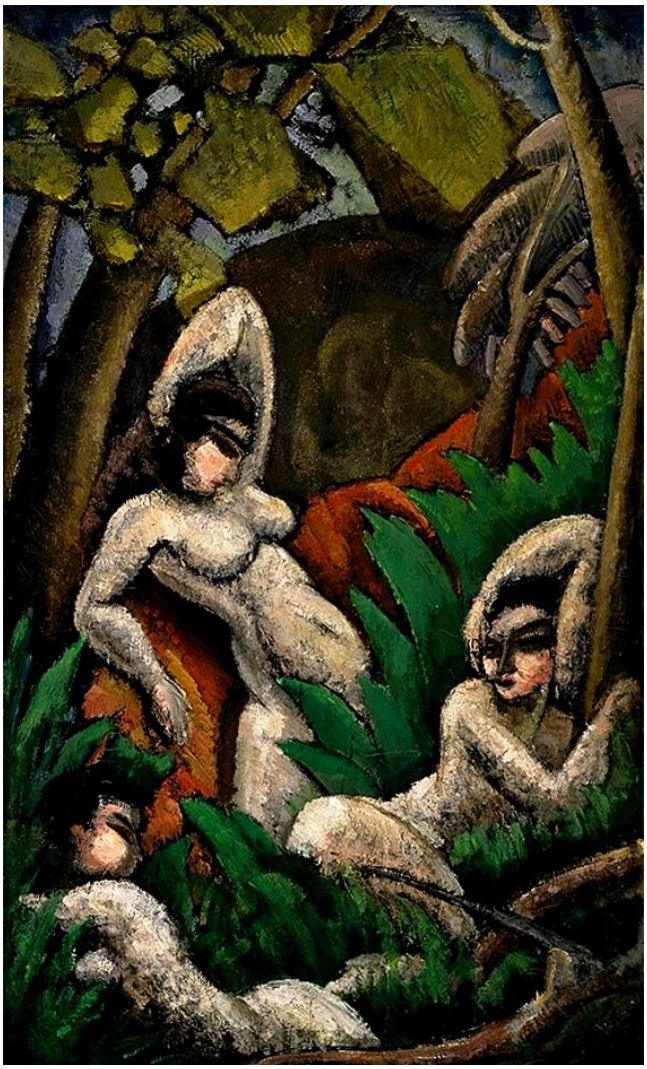

Figure 34: Weber, *Summer*, c. 1909, oil on canvas. Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. (Reproduced in Werner, *Max Weber*, unpaginated).

Figure 35: Weber, *Three Witches*, c. 1911, oil on canvas. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Image courtesy of the Beinecke Library).

Figure 36: Weber, *Three Crystal Figures*, c. 1911, oil on canvas. Gerald Peters Gallery, New York and Santa Fe (Image courtesy of The Gallery).

Figure 37: Weber, *The Geranium,* c. 1911, oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Reproduced in *Max Weber: American Cubist in Paris and London,* 71).

Figure 38: Weber, *Two Brooding Figures,* c. 1911, oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Image courtesy of The Museum).

Figure 39: Weber, *Order Out of Chaos,* c. 1912, gouache on board. Collection of Lionel Kelly (Reproduced in *Max Weber: The Cubist Decade*, 28).

Appendix A: "The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View"

In plastic art, I believe, there is a fourth dimension which may be described as the consciousness of a great and overwhelming sense of space-magnitude in all directions at one time, and is brought into existence through the three known measurements. It is not a physical entity or mathematical hypothesis, nor an optical illusion. It is real, and can be perceived and felt. It exists outside and in the presence of objects, and is the space that envelopes a tree, a tower, a mountain, or any solid; or the intervals between objects or volumes of matter if receptively beheld. It is somewhat similar to color and depth in musical sounds. It arouses imagination and stirs emotion. It is the immensity of all things. It is the ideal measurement, and is therefore are great as the ideal, perceptive or imaginative faculties of the creator, architect, sculptor, or painter.

Two objects may be of like measurements, yet not appear to be of the same size, not because of some optical illusion, but because of a greater or lesser perception of this so-called fourth dimension, the dimension of infinity. Archaic and the best of Assyrian, Egyptian, or Greek sculpture, as well as paintings by El Greco and Cezanne and other masters, are splendid examples of plastic art possessing this rare quality. A Tanagra, Egyptian, or Congo statuette often gives the impression of a colossal statue, while a poor, mediocre sculpture appears to be of the size of a pin-head, for it is devoid of this boundless sense of space or grandeur. The same is true of painting and other flat-space arts. A form at its extremity still continues reaching out into space if it is imbued with intensity or energy. The ideal dimension is dependent for its existence upon the three material dimensions, and is created entirely through plastic means, colored and constructed matter in space and light. Life and its visions can only be realized and made possible through matter.

The ideal is thus embodied in, and revealed through the real. Matter is the beginning of existence; and life or being creates or causes the ideal. Cezanne's or Giotto's achievements are most real and plastic and therefore they are so rare and distinguished. The ideal or visionary is impossible without form; even angels come down to earth. By walking upon earth and looking up at the heavens, and in no other way, can there be equilibrium. The greatest dream or vision is that which is *regiven* plastically through observation of things in nature. "Pour les progrès à réaliser il n'y a que la nature, et l'œil s'éduque à son contact." Space is empty, from a plastic point of view.

The stronger or more forceful the form the more intense is the dream or vision. Only real dreams are built upon. Even thought is matter. It is all the matter of things, real things or earth of matter. Dreams realized through plastic means are the pyramids and temples, the Acropolis and the Palatine structures; cathedrals and decorations; tunnels, bridges, and towers,; these are all of matter in space—both in one and inseparable. MAX WEBER.

Appendix B: "Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists"

I have seen Chinese dolls, Hopi Katcinas [sic] images, and also Indian quilts and baskets, and other work of savages, much finer in color than the works of the modern painter-colorists. Yet the dolls were very modest and quiet about their color, not to speak of their makers, and their makers know they were making dolls and toys and were satisfied at that. But at the *Salon d'Automne* and the *Salon des Artistes Independents*, the canvases of some of the color masters seem to shriek out, 'Why the whole world depends on me! Don't you know that?" And pretty soon a mob gathers out front, and on all sides of these masterly colored pieces, and all join the chorus in unison. This is so even for the very poorly colored paintings as long as they are in red and green, blue and yellow, or other scientific harmonies, freshly squeezed from the pure tubes. But the purely colored doll, with its intense and really beautiful color and form, is nothing but a pleasing toy, while a Cezanne or Renoir, with its marvelously rare and saturated, yet grey colored forms, in a masterpiece, and a very unpretentious and distinguished one—I'll take a Cezanne and keep my Chinese doll.

There are today painters who lay open the tubes upon their canvases, according to the laws of modern chromatics, then step upon them until the canvas is well and properly covered, and uncovered canvas in a happy accident. After this marvelous achievement they expect trees, pots, heads, figures, or other forms, and even *l'expression absolue*, to grow out of these colored steps. Impossible! No smear of Veronese green, juxtaposed with one of vermilion, or other formless complimentary daubs or splashes, however brilliant in color, can ever take the place of even the dullest toned or moderately colored painting that has form. There can be no color without there being a form, in space and in light, with substance and weight, to hold the color. I prefer a form, even if it is black and white, rather than a *tache* of formless color. And as we think of these matters, we question: "Will there ever be a science to art?"

MAX WEBER

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